

4475. k. 11
1-8
*The Nature, Obligation, and Benefit of
Publick Worship,*

I N
TWO SERMONS,

The Substance of which was

PREACH'D AT

*Peckham in Surry on the Fast,
February 17, 1747-8.*

To which are added

TWO SERMONS,

Relative to the same SUBJECT,

CONCERNING

*The Grace and Influence of Christ's
Promise to Christian Churches:*

On MAT T. xviii. 20.

By **JOHN MILNER, D.D.**

*Parcus deorum cultor, et infrequens,
Insanientis dum sapientiae
Consultus erro: nunc retrorsum
Vela dare, atque iterare cursus
Cogor relictos.*

HOR. Od. I. 34. 1.

L O N D O N :

Printed for the AUTHOR; and sold by J. NOON, at the
White Hart, Cheapside; J. WAUGH, at the *Turk's Head*,
Gracechurch-Street; R. DAVIS, at the Corner of *Sackville-*
Street, Piccadilly. M DCC XLVIII.

The Nature, Obligation, and Benefit of
Public Worship.

IN
TWO SERMONS.

The Substance of which was

PREACHED AT

Peckham in Surrey on the Fast

February 17, 1747-8.

To which are added

TWO SERMONS

RELATIVE TO THE SUBJECT,

ON

The Grace and Influence of Christ's
Promises to Christian Churches:

ON M A T T. XVIII. 20.

By JOHN MILLER, D.D.

Parvus decorum cultor, et insignis

instructio dum sapientia

Conspicitur error: nunc deus

Nunc deus, nunc deus cultor

Cogit religio.

Hoc. O. I. 34. 1.

L O N D O N :

Printed for the Author: and sold by J. Noon, at the
White Hart, Chancery; J. Waver, at the Turk's Head,
Gravelled Lane; R. Davis, at the Corner of St. Dunstons
Street, Piccadilly. MDCCLVIII.



S E R M O N I.

The Nature, Obligation, and Benefit of Publick Worship.

PSALM xxvi. 8, 9, 10.

*Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy
house, and the place where thine honour
dwelleth --- Gather not my Soul with
Sinners, nor my Life with bloody
Men :--- In whose hands is mischief,
and their right-hand is full of Bribes.*

OUR most valuable Blessings are the most common, as, light, air, sun-shine, health, liberty and salvation : so great is the liberality and goodness of God towards us. And yet the more common, the less they seem to be considered and improved : so astonishing is our carelessness and ingratitude towards God. Our obligations for what we have received : The address that is proper for what we want are the least in our thoughts. We act as if we were our own end, and absolutely at our own disposal. In this

B

temper

temper we shall always find it easier to follow inclination, than reason; to observe and honour the traditions of men, more than the commandments of God.

How apparent is this with regard to the publick Worship of the Deity. It is a duty founded upon the most solid principles; it is a duty approved by the consent and practice of mankind in all ages; even their vain superstitions shew how natural it is to fall into some way of acknowledging superior powers; yet how generally neglected amongst us, though the truth of the object, and the propriety of the service due to it, are now so much better known.

Persons of all ranks and conditions concur in nothing more than neglecting to honour God; the Creator, Lord, and Governour of the whole universe. Is there not too much reason to say? One thinks himself too high and great to own his dependance, and bend his knees to Heaven: Another too much engaged by trifles to pursue the end and perfection of his own being. One is too enlightned and improved to be found in the road of common sense; Another too vicious to be able to recollect often a presence, and power that must give him infinite disturbance. But what must be the consequence of those things? The world, for ought I can see, must degenerate more and more, since such neglects have a direct and natural tendency to banish God from the minds of men, and take off the restraints of the most awful principles.

We are met this day to humble ourselves before God for our Sins, which justly provoke his displeasure; and to obtain those publick blessings, which might render our state prosperous. To do this in a customary manner, as a thing of course, without endeavouring to answer the end professed and proposed, is nothing less than to mock God to his face, and insult him more audaciously in the forms of religion. I hope we are now met with better dispositions, to remember our own, and the nations sins with deep contrition, and fix our resolutions for better obedience.

I shall

I shall not speak of sin in general, nor enumerate those particular sins which constitute national guilt; but have one Sin only in view, and that a capital one, which cherishes many others, and contributes mightily to the growth of wickedness in the world, namely, the neglect of publick Worship.

The language and example of the text recommends the contrary practice, and if this can be well established, its excellency and obligation; the sinfulness of the other must of consequence appear to us. *Lord I have loved the habitation of thine house &c.*

It appears from the Psalm, that *David* was in some great distress, and that it was not the least part of his resentment under it to be deprived of publick Worship. In this circumstance he appeals to God for the integrity of his heart. *Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in my uprightness, I have trusted also in the Lord^a.*

— Conscious of his innocence he submits himself to any proof, by which God should think fit to try him.

Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart^b.—

Then he offers it as an Evidence of his sincerity, and piety, that the friendship of bad men had been ever his abhorrence. *I have not sate with vain Persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked^c.*

Men of a different character were his delight, even such as feared and honoured God. With such he loved to join in social worship; in that place, and in that manner, which God himself had expressly appointed, viz. in the tabernacle, where was the visible symbol of the divine presence, and the promise of divine blessing. Thither the Tribes went up; there they united in one solemn service; and there he found the noblest pleasure of his life. *Lord I have loved the habitation of thine house, and the place where thine honour dwells.*— This being his invariable temper and frame, he humbly hoped, that God would not leave him in his present distress, and abandon him to a society, ever his aversion. He trusted that God

B 2

would

^a Verse 1.

Verse 2.

^c Verse 4.

would not give him up to their corruptions and snares, whilst he lived: or to partake of their fate and ruin, when he died. *Gather not my Soul with Sinners, nor my life with bloody men, in whose hands is mischief, and their right-hand is full of Bribes.*

In the words two things are obvious.—— *First*, the testimony of his uprightness, in the great regard and esteem he paid to Publick Worship. *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thine house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*—— *Secondly*, the object of his hope in consequence of it, that God would not suffer him to come under the power, or fate of wicked and profligate men. *Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men; in whose hands is mischief, and their right-hand is full of Bribes.*

If we would act a consistent part, we ought to give the same testimony of our piety towards God. We have the same transcendant Object to adore; but with much greater advantage, in the clearer discovery of it; and a more rational method of address to it: In nobler motives to animate our hopes, and, I trust, it will not be thought the least considerable, that it will raise our expectations of safety from our worst enemies.—— From the words I shall take occasion

- I. . . . *To consider the nature of Religious Worship in general.*
- II. . . . *To prove the Equity and Reasonableness of it, especially in a Publick Manner.*
- III. *To make some useful reflections on the Subject.*

The Principles here intended to be discussed are of very great consequence, as they relate to God's honour and our own benefit. I shall endeavour to establish them on the most certain grounds, and appeal to every man's inward sense and feeling for their truth and evidence.

I. . . . *I would consider the nature of Religious Worship in general.* Worship imports the giving honour and reverence to another, and is either *civil*, or *religious*.

Civil

Civil Worship is that honour and reverence we pay to men; either — on account of their superiority in rank or office. The Authority with which such are invested; the greater power of doing good, which such are supposed to enjoy, are looked upon accessions to their personal character, and a ground of esteem. In this view we reverence Princes, Magistrates, and other great Personages. *Render to all their dues—honour to whom honour*^d. — Or on account of pre-eminence in wisdom and experience; because the counsels of such will be valuable to us, and deserve our attention. On this foundation young persons are obliged to reverence the aged; and children, to honour their Parents. — Or else on account of meer courtesy and friendship, in which we discover a kind, affable, and obliging temper, readily admitting some superiority in the person, to whom the respect is paid. *In honour preferring one another*^e.

Religious Worship has but one object, *i. e.* God; and but one degree, *i. e.* the highest and best we can pay. It consists in those sentiments and affections; in that union of a rational love and filial fear, which are suitable to and worthy of the object we worship. *Give unto the Lord glory and strength: give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name*^f. — Religious Worship, directed to God, and terminating in him, has these two parts.

Adoration and Devotedness.

FIRST, Worship is expressed by *Adoration*. To adore, among the Heathens, was to put the hand to the mouth in token of their reverencing the object before them, or bending the body in praying and beseeching it. The former was certainly a very antient custom, as appears from the book of *Job*. *If I be held the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness. And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand*^g. Custom introduced other actions, expressive

^d Rom. xiii. 7.

^e Rom. xii. 10.

^f Psal. xcvi. 7, 8.

^g Job. xxxi. 26, 27.

pressive of reverence, as, bending the body down; falling at the feet; prostration, &c.^h The same Word, translated to *worship*, and the same actions of *bowing*, and *falling down*, are applied in Scripture to the true God, and with such restriction, as to make it unlawful to worship any other object in that manner.

When the *Devil* tempted our Saviour with an offer of the glory and kingdoms of the world, he asked him, to fall down and *worship* or adore him, *i. e.* as Lord and giver of those things. Our Saviour in his answer rebuked this presumption, alledging that herein he challenged to himself the peculiar honours of Deity. *Thou shalt worship, or adore, the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*. *Cornelius*, when he met *Peter*, *fell at his feet and worshipped*, or adored him^k. But the Apostle refused this honour as too much for a mortal man. *John* in the close of his revelations, *fell down at the Angels feet* with design to *worship*, or adore him, who had been his guide and kind instructor in those mysterious scenes; but he refused this honour as too great for an immortal Angel, and bids him reserve it, as the peculiar right of the eternal God, saying, *worship or adore God*^l.

Adora-

^h Adorare. *i. e.* manum ori admoveere; vel, corpore inclinato ad aliquem orare. — Προσκυνέω, osculari, adoro. In adoration, says *Pliny*, we carry our right-hand to our lips, and turn about the whole body. In adorando dextram ad osculum referimus, totumque corpus circumagimus, *Plin.* xxiii. 2. — *Lucius*, having ordained that *Gaius Caesar* should be adored as a God, when he returned from his province of *Syria*, durst not approach him, but with his head veiled, and, turning about his body, falling prostrate before him. *Primus C. Caesarem adorari ut Deum instituit, cum reversus ex Syria non aliter adire ausus esset, quam capite velato, circumvertensque se, deinde procumbens.* *Suston. vit. Aul. Vitell. cap. 2.*

— When *Demosthenes* sucked the poison from the reed, or ring, in which he had concealed it, he was supposed, by those who observed him put his hand to his mouth, only adoring. Τὴν χεῖρα τῷ στόματι προσαναγνῶν, ἢ δὲν ἄλλ', ἢ προσκυνεῖν ὑπελάμβανον. *Lucian. Demosth. encom. ad fin.* — It was a custom in most Heathen Nations, when they adored their Idols, to clap their right-hand to their lips, with the fore finger resting upon the extended thumb, and then to turn about the body to the right.

^l *Matt.* iv. 9, 10.

^k *Acts* x. 25.

^l *Rev.* xxii. 8, 9.

Adoration then is a proper part of religious Worship; but it must be the adoration of the mind, which consists in those sentiments and affections, that exalt God above all; and leave the Soul in the profoundest awe and veneration: For instance, it consists

1.) *In the highest esteem.* How great must God be! God the unoriginated, underived source of Being, that exists by a necessity within himself, yet all his actions free: crowned with every perfection; inexhausted in the sources of his own greatness, and happiness. Immense Being! He surrounds all nature with his power; fills all space with his presence; and makes his word swifter than *the wings of the morning*^m. This is the Object we adore; the most excellent of all excellent Beings, the wisest of all intelligent natures: Unchangeable, Almighty, Everlasting; the nature, and extent of whose Perfections we cannot fully reach by the utmost effort of our faculties, Incomprehensible. Well might the Philosopher, “when asked what God was, “desire a day to give in his answer, and after that “two more, intimating by such a delay, that the object was too great for him; that the more he gazed “upon this refulgent light, the more obscurity and “darkness oppressed his mindⁿ.” The greatness and dignity of the object is a just ground of esteem. We rise from the narrow and scattered excellencies of the creation to the supreme Excellency; the idea grows as we contemplate, and as we separate from it every weakness and imperfection; but we are soon lost in the infinite and unknown. *None by searching can find out God:*

^m Psal. cxxxix. 9.

ⁿ *Roges me, quid, aut quale sit Deus; auctore utar Simonide: de quo cum quaesivisset hoc idem tyrannus Hiero, deliberandi causa, sibi unum diem postulavit. Cum idem ex eo postridie quaereret, biduum petiit. Cum saepius duplicaret numerum dierum, admiransque Hiero requireret, cur ita faceret. Quia quanto, inquit, diutius considero, tanto mihi spes (nim. investigandi) videtur obscurior.*

Cic. de Nat. Deor. i. 22.

° Job xi. 7.

God: None can find out the Almighty to perfection *. Adore, O my soul, the wonderful God; adore with the profoundest respect. Keep thy humble distance, and behold how he soars above all thought: How he leaves thy towering imagination far below his throne!

2.) *Thanksgiving and Praise.* This is strictly due to the source of Being and Happiness; to him "the Best, the Greatest; whose Greatness is his Goodness, as it is more glorious in itself, and more acceptable to others, to be good, than powerful; to be loved, than admired?" How various are the instances of his Goodness! He deserves our devout and grateful acknowledgments, for raising us to the dignity of rational creatures, and stamping upon our minds his own divine impress. By this we are capable of looking up to our Original; of surveying the wonders of Creation, and making such reflections upon both as might inspire us with pleasure and praise. What thanks are due, that our bodies are curiously framed; our lives wonderfully sustained amidst the accidents of a mortal state? Wherever we turn ourselves we are surrounded with Goodness. The world is laid out a beautiful scene to entertain and please us. The rising sun, the falling shower, the changing seasons, the fruitful year minister all their grateful influences to us, and shall we stand silent and mute amidst so many incentives to praise. The Christian will adore the God of Grace. The *tender Father*, the *reconciling God*, the *Almighty Saviour*, are not only new, but surprizing subjects of praise. He will magnify the great *Jehovah*, that establishes his covenant, and makes the promise sure; that sent his Son to multiply our blessings and enlarge our hopes; to assist our duty, and purchase heaven. How inexhausted those subjects of praise! How are we lost in this profusion and extent of

* *A majoribus autem nostris dicitur Optimus, Maximus; et quidam ante optimus, i. e. beneficentissimus, quam maximus, quia majus est, certeque gratius, prodesse omnibus, quam opes magnas habere.*

Cic. de Nat. Deor. ii. 25.

of goodness! Our warmest gratitude how it languishes, how it sinks below the occasion! Adore, O my soul, the indulgent Creator and Father of mankind; adore the bountiful God. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits*¹. Conscious of thine own weakness summon the aid of every creature to assist thy praise. Praise him all ye nations of the earth; Praise him ye Angels of light, ye *morning stars, who sang the creation*²; praise him in your exalted strains.

3.) *Love*. Not love with emotion and transport, such as we feel in our animal passions; but a rational complacency and delight in God. If excellency, if goodness have any attractives to engage affection, they must be very powerful in this object. What object so amiable as perfect excellence and perfect light? What goodness so exuberant, and diffusive as that which passes through the whole frame of Nature, producing order, proportion, and happiness. God is purely good, gracious and beneficent, *he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*³. From him Angels derive their blessedness, and the subjects of their rapturous songs. From Him men receive life with all its blessings; their comforts, aids, preventions, deliverances and future hopes. But Christianity has increased the sum of those benefits; offered unsearchable riches and everlasting treasures. Herein God commendeth *his* love, and demands *ours* with almost an irresistible power. Herein he would unite our hearts to him by the ties of the most chearful gratitude and ardent love. Love is the soul of all Religion. It insensibly forms us into the image of the beloved object; and constantly fits and disposes us to serve and please him. Can I delight in the benefit, and not in the benefactor? Can I rejoice in the gift, and have no affections to raise and unite me to the donor? If I enjoy any thing delightful shall I not love him, who

C

has

¹ Psal. ciii. 1, 2.

² Job xxxviii. 7.

³ Psal. cxiv. 9.

has given me the capacity of delight? View, O my soul, this beneficent, lovely Being; view him until his bounty, so freely dispensed, so amply diffused, shall win thy heart, shall teach thee to scorn every meaner rival, and unite all thy affections in gratitude, delight and admiration. Love him with the strength and purity of all thy powers; raise thyself to that supreme love, *with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind*^t; and long to ascend, to express the adoration of thy love in the language and ardors of immortal spirits.

4.) *Reverence and godly fear*^u. An humble distance becomes our imperfection, and sinful demerit. When we have tried to form the worthiest conceptions of God, exalted in excellency, and perfect in happiness; that wants no tribute, and fears no combination, we must fall vastly short of what he is in himself. But then when our thoughts fail in reaching such immense heights, there is another way of greatening the object, and that is by self-abasement; by sinking low in so great a presence. *Shall not his excellency make you afraid, and his dread fall upon you*^x? Think, O my soul, how mean thou art before such perfection; how poor before such all-sufficiency. What am I, *when all the nations of the Earth in his sight are but as the dust of the ballance, and counted to him less than nothing and vanity*^y? Consider how vile thou art by reason of thy sins, and shouldst thou not humble thyself to the dust, before one infinitely pure, and gloriously holy: before one, whose frown is the greatest curse; whose indignation is the hottest hell. His beloved attributes should raise in us a filial fear of offending. Superstition is an unreasonable groundless fear of God, which leads men to various, and sometimes monstrous services, in hopes of pleasing him. But as there is nothing in his nature shocking and frightful to a well-disposed mind; a fear of offending a beloved character will be thought a genuine mark of esteem, and consequently such a godly fear

^t Luke x. 27. ^u Heb. xii. 28. ^x Job xiii. 11. ^y Isa. xl. 15. 172

fear well becomes the virtuous and the good. Let me therefore *fear the Lord and his goodness^a* : Nor presume, on priviledges, or discoveries of mercy, to serve him in a careless, irreverent manner. *There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared^a*. I would therefore compose my thoughts, unite my heart for a solemn service; *for God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him^b*.

SECONDLY; Worship is likewise expressed by our *Devotedness* to God, or by such acts of the mind as shew a lively sense of our dependence; that we can rely upon those perfections we adore; and consequently that our piety is not the result of custom, but principle; not the effect of superstition, but a pleasing choice. This came into the notion of Worship among the *Hebrews*, and is well expressed by their cleaving to the Lord. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave^c*, be united and devoted. — This devotedness comprehends these particulars, viz.

1.) *Faith in God*; or a firm persuasion of his being Creator, Governour, and Judge of the world. His existence is so strongly reflected from the whole Creation, that I question whether it be possible for the most sceptical to doubt of it. From the effects we are necessarily lead up to a wise, intelligent first cause of all things. And if so, we shall be lead further by a rational chain of consequences, to believe that he that made the world still preserves and sustains it; governs it by his wisdom, and finally will judge it in equity. When I consider his perfection of knowledge and power, I am well assured, that no secret can be concealed from his eye, no flight put out of the reach of his power, no art elude his justice, and no confederacy shake his throne. So that his judgment will be ac-

C 2

cording

^a Hof. iii. 5.
^c Deut. x. 20.

^a Psal. cxxx. 4.

^b Psal. lxxxix. 7.

cording to truth, exact and impartial. *He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*^d. Those are first principles of all Religion, in which Christianity has made no other alteration, than declaring the affairs of Providence in the hands of a Mediator; appointing the Judge and judgment day, with some awful circumstances attending it, all perfectly consistent with the natural and original kingdom of God. — This being so, we ought in worship to express our firm belief of those principles. We must not content ourselves with an occasional thought or fluctuating notion, but it must be a settled opinion, a lively, affecting impression on the soul. Nothing less will God accept, but what animates and warms our devotion, and becomes afterward an effectual principle of conduct. *Thou, even thou art Lord alone, thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all, and the host of heaven worshippeth Thee*^e.

2.) *Hope in God.* In this sinful and imperfect state we find a strange mixture of good and evil. Futurity has a dark impenetrable scene before it, and when we look toward it, it will be with some solicitude and concern. Here we have nothing naturally to sustain us, like the mercy and goodness of God. From this we look for protection from danger; and the pardon of those Sins we repent of. But then as we are Sinners, we shall have reason to fear, as well as hope, because God is a just and righteous Governor; and punishment appears sometimes as necessary as pardon; severity as clemency. This must consequently abate the strength of our hope, and teach us to speak with the same uncertainty, as the men of Nineveh did under a sense of guilt. *Who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not*^f? However in a state of trial, where God exercises great long-suffering and patience,

^d Heb. xi. 6.^e Nehem. ix. 6.^f Jon. iii. 9.

patience, it is more reasonable to believe, that hope should be greater than fear. And in case of sin, we should take too much upon us to say, that God *cannot* recede from his right of punishing; and pardon the penitent, by virtue of his supreme authority and essential goodness. Hope then being a reasonable principle, we ought to exercise it in worship, and apply to God for succour in our distresses. Now hope implies in it these two things, and both highly conducive to the honour of divine goodness, namely, expectation, and patience — What we hope for we expect to enjoy; consequently that good, which is the object of hope must be possible and attainable. We cannot ask for any mercy, either for ourselves or others, but on this persuasion that it may be had, and no invincible bar in the way to it. Suppose the contrary, and we cannot pray in faith or hope; but shall so far find ourselves in the same state with Devils themselves, a state of despair. — The other thing is patience. — When we address ourselves to God for succour, it becomes us to wait his pleasure; to refer ourselves, for the time and manner, to his wisdom. *If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it* ^g. The Christian will observe with pleasure, how he stands upon a firmer foundation. What Reason makes the object of hope, Christianity makes the subject of a promise: What is a deduction from natural principles, which the generality cannot so readily discern, the Gospel derives from the authority and testimony of God, and a particular constitution of Grace in the hands of a Mediator, and those lie obvious to the meanest capacity. — Thus in devoting ourselves to God, we should exalt his goodness by a firm dependence and hope. We should eye this perfection in our wants, take fast hold of it under our fears, and not let it go without a blessing. *Truely my Soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my Salvation. My Soul wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him* ^h.

The

^g Rom. viii. 25.

^h Psal. lxii. 1. 5.

The Christian can exercise this hope with peculiar pleasure, for it is the lovely representation of the Gospel state, *that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*, i. e. on their faith and repentance¹. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope*².

3.) *Trust in God*. This trust has a respect to the event of things; for though the use of means may be in our power, success will be always under a higher influence and disposal. To trust God will be a very great instance of our piety, as it is a resigning ourselves to the care of infinite wisdom and power; and an acquiescing in the will of God. In worship it becomes us thus to resign to the wisdom of God. He is Governour of the world, and has a right to dispose of us whether we are pleased with it, or not. He is wiser than we are, and knows what condition is best for us. He is kind and good, and inclined to do what is best, if it be consistent with his universal plan of happiness. Those are the Supports of our Trust, and in the Exercise of it we give God great honour. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*¹.—It becomes us to acquiesce in the will of God on this firm principle, *that whatever he does is right*. Should he appoint affliction for us, we should take it in good part, as from the hand of his providence. We should lose nothing of our esteem of his righteousness, nor suffer ourselves to doubt of his wisdom and goodness. No hard thoughts of God should harbour in our breast, nor should we slacken the course of our obedience and zeal. *Though he slay me yet will I trust in him*². What an instance of sublime Piety! Rather than accuse God of severity, we should take an occasion from the disagreeable event to bring our faults to

¹ 2 Cor. v. 19.
² Job xiii. 15.

³ 1 Pet. i. 3.

⁴ Prov. iii. 5, 6.

to remembrance; to correct our fondness for creatures, and raise our thoughts above them. The Christian has abundant reason to trust God in this manner, as he is assured by a most gracious extensive promise, *that all things shall work together for good to them that love Godⁿ.*

4.) And lastly, The concomitant of our piety must be *an honest and cheerful obedience to the will of God.* Holiness is the scope of all religion, and without it all our professions are vain and contemptible. To pursue it is the noblest way of glorifying God; to attain it the most lovely resemblance of God, and consequently the measures of God's honour and our happiness here coincide. Holiness consists in such purity and rectitude of mind, as engages us to prefer and love virtue, and hate the contrary. With such a disposition we must come to worship God, or we prophane the service. — 'Tis necessary in regard to God's authority. He commands it, and will command it, as invariably as he loves himself, and esteems this the united splendor of all his perfections. *He is glorious in Holiness^o.* — 'Tis necessary in regard to the enjoyment of God. Worship is an intercourse with heaven; but what communion can an holy God have with an impure heart, that is nothing but a nest of crawling lusts? Can a vicious person exalt one, whose very being he could wish annihilated? How love one, whose moral attributes are a direct reproach to him? How delight in one, whose almighty anger rolls in dismal thunder against him? An unholy worshipper, one that lives in any known sin, insults the object he pretends to reverence, and effectually barrs the way to the favours he comes to ask. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not bear me^p.* When therefore we come to worship God, let us offer pure thoughts, virtuous affections, and holy purposes. It becomes us then to express our utter abhorrence of sin; an humble sor-

row

ⁿ Rom. viii. 28.

^o Exod. xv. 11.

^p Psal. lxi. 18.

row for having offended; and serious purposes of offending no more. *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, a thing fitting and reasonable in itself; I have born chastisement I will not offend any more. That which I see not teach thou me; If I have done iniquity I will do no more*¹. Thus the will of God, commanding virtue and forbidding vice, however discovered to us, whether from the nature and relation of things, or the precepts of his word, should be sacred and venerable to us. We should receive it with the pleasure of truth, flowing from the eternal fountain of light and truth. *I esteem thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way*².

Those are the sentiments and affections, which should really exist in our minds, whilst we are worshipping God. Those are the exercises of a devout heart, in prayer, and praise. 'Tis internal worship; the religion of nature; the homage of a Rational Creature, and the worship of the Gospel too in spirit and truth. The object is the same, the virtues of the mind the same: only by the constitution of the Gospel, we are to direct our worship to God in the name, and through the mediation of Jesus Christ; to implore the aids of that Spirit, *which helpeth our infirmities*³; and to look to the glorious hope, which is set before us, to animate, and warm our devotions. *Fervent in spirit serving the Lord*⁴.

This is internal Worship, the devotion of the mind, which God principally regards, and without which the most costly and pompous services are of no signification or value. This is consequently that which should principally engage our attention and zeal. However give me leave to observe, that external worship must not be neglected, because this is also necessary in proportion to its use and end, *namely*, to testify our own piety, in society with others; as also to excite and animate theirs. Publick honours are due

¹ Job xxxiv. 31, 32.

² Psal. cxix. 128.

³ Rom. viii. 26.

⁴ Rom. xii. 11.

due to the Deity, which cannot be paid without some external acts.

Amongst us these external acts are considered as signs and tokens of our inward piety viz. standing uncovered, and occasionally lifting up the eyes and hands to heaven.——Kneeling uncovered, and occasionally lifting up the eyes and hands to heaven——Prostration. When either of those are used in a serious, decent manner, without any trifling or theatrical airs, we express in a proper manner our inward devotion, and beyond that bodily gestures are not necessary. To multiply or diversify them without necessity may prove of dangerous consequence to real Religion, as it brings it too much under the power of sense, and may lead men to mistake the shadow for the substance, and to put God off with pomp and ceremony, instead of true devotion.

It should moderate a Zeal, in pressing upon the consciences of others one particular mode and fashion of external Worship, to consider——That it is not in the least necessary on God's account; but our own. And therefore if we attribute to it a greater efficacy or sanctity, in this view, as if it was an obligation upon God, we quite mistake the case. He wants no such significations of our piety, being perfectly acquainted with our moral temper; but in compliance with the weakness and imperfection of our present state, he requires it, as a testimony of our piety, to one another. The most pompous and magnificent shews of piety, unless they are accompanied with just sentiments, and animated with proper affections, are too mean for divine acceptance, whatever opinion we may have of them. We must not think, that God is best pleased, with what we are most pleased. Under this wrong notion, it will be easy to transfer our own imaginations to the worship of God, and debase a reasonable service into a *bodily exercise which profiteth little*.——It should be considered, that a

D

confi-

constitution of worship, which consisted of many external rites and ceremonies, and which God himself appointed in the Jewish Church, was repealed to make way for the more spiritual and rational worship of the Gospel. *The hour cometh*, said the Saviour, who spoke as one having authority, *and now is*, under the Gospel dispensation, *when the true Worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him*^x. The worship of the Gospel has the characters of plainness and simplicity in it, more than any other institution. It is freer from positive and ceremonious rites, and for that reason more adapted to the nature and dignity of the object. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and truth*^y. From which passage of our Saviours it is clear, that that is the best worship which is founded in the nature of God; in just conceptions of him as a pure and perfect mind.—Again the diversifying and imposing external worship has been the ground both of superstition and persecution in all ages. This has shaded the real beauties of Religion. This has embittered men's spirits one against another, occasioned penal laws, forfeitures, imprisonments, and even murder, inconsistent with religion and all humanity. How evident are those things in the Romish Church? What a burden of rites and ceremonies has she introduced, heavier than the Jewish yoke? What an insipid repetition of *Ave Marias* and *Pater Nosters*? What a trifling parade of different postures, habits, and decorations? Nay, they have not only corrupted external worship to superstition, but idolatry, contrary to the express letter of the Second Commandment^z. Reflections of this nature are proper, to temper

^x John iv. 23.

^y Ib. v. 24.

^z The Second Commandment is, *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing, that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them,*

temper a Zeal for particular modes of external worship, and turn it to that, which is of more importance,

D 2

them, nor serve them. &c. Exod. xx. 4, 5. *You shall make you no Idol, nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land to bow down unto it.* Levit. xxvi. 1. One would think it impossible to mistake the meaning of those passages, or the nature of the Sin condemned in them. And yet the Papiſts, as if there were no ſuch paſſages, have preſumed to introduce images and pictures, *the likenesses of things*, into their books and places of devotion; and bow down to them. This geſture of *bowing down*, was an expreſſion of adoration, and therefore *this*, or any other ſignification of reſpect, which the cuſtom or conſent of men hath appropriated to Religion, muſt be equally forbidden, and unlawful to be uſed before any other object, but God. *Bowing down* (in a place dedicated to the worſhip of God, and where men are aſſembled for that purpoſe) before any object of ſenſe, muſt likewiſe be forbidden. God is ſo jealous of his honour, that he will not permit the ſame external ſign, by which he is adored, to be offered to any ſenſible object, in the ſame place with himſelf. And therefore their bowing down, at the elevation of the Hoſt, a ſenſible object, or before images, is a real act of idolatry.—We bow to a Prince, and kneel to a King. The external act is the ſame as in adoration, but not being done in a place of worſhip, or in an aſſembly met for religious purpoſes, it is interpreted no other, and can bare no other meaning, than a piece of civil reſpect and loyalty. Where the outward action is the ſame, 'tis only the difference of the place, and the different ends of the aſſembly, which can enable by-ſtanders to diſtinguiſh between loyalty and idolatry.—In defence of themſelves the Papiſts would take the advantage of ſome diſtinctions, viz. 1.) They ſay there is a difference between *λατρεία* and *δουλεία*; the firſt they appropriate to God and call *worſhip*, the ſecond they apply to creatures and call *ſervice*. But the Scriptures make no ſuch diſtinction. In thoſe, and prophane authors, the nouns and verbs are uſed promiſcuouſly one for another. In the following paſſages, the *doulia* is uſed of the divine Being, Deut. xiii. 4.—Jud. ii. 7.—1 Sam. ii. 3. ib. xii. 10.—Matt. vi. 24.—1 Theſſ. i. 9.—Acts xx. 19. On the other hand the *latría* is applied to creatures, Lev. xxiii. 7. 8. 21.—Deut. xxviii. 48.—Rom. i. 25. *Serrarius* owns ingenuouſly, that there is the ſame virtue of religion in both. *in Litan. 2. q. 27.*—2.) They diſtinguiſh between *absolute* and *relative* worſhip. They ſay, they reverence for inſtance the Saints, with inferior honour, as belonging to God, and on account of their gifts received from Him. So ſay the Heathens for their worſhip of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, &c. They deified many things in conſideration of the benefit

tance, the worship of the Mind: to make us content with the use of our own judgment and liberty, without pretending to impose upon the consciences of others. Upon the whole, external worship is necessary, and a decent regard is to be paid to it, for testifying our own piety, as observed before, and exciting that of others; but not necessary in one particular mode, or fashion.

As for preaching, or publick instruction, which generally accompanies Publick Worship, though it be allowed no part of it, is yet of great Service to mankind; to the bulk of it at least. Nay it may be so to persons of improved understandings. Suppose it informs them of no new truths, yet it may revive the old ones, in such a favourable conjuncture, and with such a particular address, as to render them more impressive, and effectual. It is a design well calculated to spread the knowledge of God; encourage the virtues of a good life; raise the afflicted, and support all our good purposes, and therefore well deserves the countenance of our example.— So much for the nature of Religious Worship. The length to which I have been carried will not I hope be thought improper, on a subject of such importance, and which deserves to be universally understood, as an act and exercise of the mind.— I proceed

II . . . To prove the equity and reasonableness of Worship in general; and of Publick Worship in particular. Some in all ages have been ready to question its

use derived from them. *Utilitatum igitur magnitudine constituti sunt ii Dii, qui utilitates quasque gignebant.* And this they ultimately referred to God; because whatever was of great advantage to mankind must proceed from the divine goodness. *Quicquid enim magnam utilitatem generi offeret humano, id non sine Divina Bonitate erga homines fieri arbitrabantur.*— *Quarum omnium rerum quia vis erat tanta, ut sine Deo regi non posset, ipsa res Deorum nomen obtinuit.* Cic. de Nat. Deor. II. 23. 24. And yet the Scriptures every where charge them with idolatry, and will maintain the honours of the Deity inviolable. *I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.* Isa. xlii. 8.

its obligation and benefit. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we prayed unto him?* — I hope it will be thought a reasonable vindication of Religion, to shew this part of it a reasonable service^b: That to worship God is not the contrivance of artful men, or an arbitrary constitution; but founded in the perfections of God, the obligations He has laid upon us, and our necessary dependance: That it results from the immutable principles of justice and gratitude. Principles which rise out of the law of Nature; a law the earliest we were under, and which every man carries some institutes of in his own breast; those principles, I say, lose not their obligation, by men's uniting into societies; but rather receive additional force from a general influence and encouragement. Private persons bring with them into society natural principles, and therefore it would be of use to consider them as the basis of civil and religious constitutions. And when things appear in this light, there will be the less room for prejudice and evasion. — The obligation of the duty under consideration arises from

The Nature and Perfections of God.

The Nature and Condition of Man.

FIRST; If we consider the Nature and Perfections of God, it must appear a just and reasonable duty to worship Him. I shall confine myself here to these particulars, namely,

His transcendant Excellency and Greatness.

His supreme dominion and providence.

His diffusive Goodness and bounty.

1.) *His transcendant excellency and greatness.* We are not to conceive of this as a single Attribute, but a refulgency derived from all the rest; the united glory of every Perfection. And what an Idea of dignity must this raise in us, if we are capable of any reflections?

^a Job 21. 15. Mal. iii. 4. ^b Rom. xii. 1.

tions? On view of any object about us, of some considerable magnitude or extension, we are struck with admiration. The mind grows, and enlarges itself, whilst it beholds; but the pleasure soon ends, because the object is finite, and the more capacious mind surrounds and comprehends it. God is an object too great for the mind to reach. He has every excellency we can imagine, and in such extent and perfection as we cannot imagine. Is not this an Object most worthy our esteem and admiration? Here is a Nature not to be circumscribed by time or place: Attributes not to be scanned by our finite measures and comparisons. And is not this an Object adorable? When we look upon small portions of his Wisdom in the creation, we find ourselves almost irresistably moved to admire them. And is there no honour, no praise due to the Author, to the inexhausted fountain of wisdom. We think it decent, and acting agreeable to the truth and worth of things to pay respect to a superior character amongst men. But what are the greatest Monarchs, or the sagest Philosophers, or the wisest Lawgivers, tho' the delight of mankind, when compared with an infinite understanding, an omnipotent power, a boundless goodness, a matchless wisdom? Incomprehensible Grandeur! We shall not act according to Truth, which is just; nor ourselves, on all other occasions, which is natural, if such excellency and magnificence of Being do not render us devout in praise. *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised*^c.

2.) *His supreme dominion and Providence.* This Principle is the great support of Piety, and in all reason should be the subject of its gratitude. 'Tis easy in its notion; delightful in its application: the comfort of the virtuous, the hope of the afflicted, the joy of the whole earth. *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof*^d. This doctrine of Providence was evident to the Heathen world, and considered by their wise men not only as the

ground

^c Psal. cxlv. 3.

^d Psal. xcvi. 1.

ground of Piety and Prayer ; but of the great virtues of society. However I beg leave to explain it, to prevent any misconceptions about it, detrimental to Religion. — Providence is either *general* or *particular*.

God's *general providence* is his establishing and sustaining a constitution of things, subject to certain laws ; in which a connection is settled between cause and effect ; every part has its determinate force, and the whole system exquisitely adjusted to produce beauty, order, and happiness. — When the glories of divine wisdom and power shine so bright in the whole frame of Nature, what an invitation is this to magnify and adore the Author. When such benign influences are daily and hourly derived to us ; such delightful scenes are laid out for us, how must our minds be alienated from wise and virtuous reflections, if we have no praise to offer, if we discover no indications of a grateful mind ? Benefits received, and thanksgivings returned, ought to be as inviolably connected in the moral world, as cause and effect in the natural.

God's *particular providence* is his directing events, and even producing new ones by his immediate influence. And this extends both to the *natural* and *moral* world. — In the *natural world*, notwithstanding the establishing general laws, as before ; yet it is reasonable to suppose that the Creator should be able on all occasion to suspend any of those laws, as in the case of miracles. 'Tis equally reasonable to suppose that he should be able to affect the powers of nature, strengthen or weaken their force ; compound or separate their influence,

* Sin autem Dii neque possunt juvare, neque volunt ; nec omino curant ; nec, quid agamus, animadvertunt ; nec est quod ab his hominum vitam permanare possit : quid est, quod ullos Diis immortalibus cultus, honores, preces adhibeamus ? In specie autem fictae simulationis, sicut reliquae virtutes, ita Pietas inesse non potest, cum qua simul et sanctitatem, et religionem tolli necesse est : quibus sublatis perturbatio vitae sequitur, et magna confusio. Atque haud scio, an pietate adversus Deos sublata, fides etiam, et societas humani generis, et una excellentissima virtus, Justitia, tollatur.

Cic. de Nat. Deor, 1, 2.

influence, and thereby give a different season or moment to events. Thus he can direct the winds, the rain, and heat in such different seasons and proportions, as to affect the common blessings of Life. *Fire and hail, Snow and vapour, and stormy winds fulfilling his word*^t. We see human skill can produce surprizing effects by natural causes; and shall we ascribe less efficacy to divine wisdom.— In the *moral world*, Providence principally carries on its designs *by impressions on the mind*. We allow without any hesitation, that one friend can change the views and settled purposes of another, by offering proper arguments to his consideration, without destroying his moral agency. And is it less reasonable to admit this of the Father of spirits? Of one who knows our frame, and the springs by which we are moved. Who knows what objects of hope or fear; of interest or danger are proper, and when, to influence us. Men are capable of doing much good or hurt to one another; and therefore in such a way, they may be made the immediate instruments of Providence, so as to affect the interests of private or publick life; to raise up, or pull down; to save or destroy &c. This gives us, I conceive, a very easy, rational

^t Psal. cxlviii. 8.

I beg leave to put a case here for the illustration of this subject. Suppose a person going along the street, and an house should fall down just as he had passed it. He might very justly and piously thank God for his preservation from that eminent danger: For, admitting the house to fall according to settled laws of decay; and that it could not have fallen sooner or later than that very moment, in which all its principal connections gave way: yet the man, passing along, might have met with some remora or interruption before he came to the place of danger. A Friend, *for instance*, might have stopped him just to pay his compliments &c. and by that short delay only, his passing might have been rendered co-incident with the fall of that house, and its ruin proved fatal to him. He has reason therefore to thank God, that no such impediment came in his way, and that he was pleased kindly to direct and number his steps. I am persuaded many such merciful restraints, preventions, and deliverances are produced every day by the secret and invisible touches of a divine hand. This as it is reasonable in notion, so it is more encouraging in practice, to commit ourselves every day to the tuition and care of Providence, than to walk up and down the world surrounded with a dark and dreadful Fatality.

tional, and extensive notion of God's immediate influence on the Natural and Moral world, and lays a firm foundation for prayer, submission, and dependance; an honour strictly due to the sovereign disposer of all events.— Since all our interests are absolutely in God's hands, and he can increase, or lessen them as he sees fitting; should we not carry it with equal respect to him, as to a friend, on whom we depend for lesser things? Should we not represent our wants in an humble manner, and ask counsel in every difficult circumstance? Should we not beseech him to direct our affairs in a free and easy course; and enrich them with his secret blessing? We are exposed to innumerable temptations and dangers, which many times come upon us unobserved. Should we not continually implore his protection, who can ensure our comfort and safety? We many times come into distress, and as our passions are moved, so are we likely to feel its weight and pressure. Is it not becoming then to look up, and acknowledge the divine permission; and ask the aids of fortitude, patience, and resignation. Since finally, 'tis so easy for him to cross our purposes, and blast our fairest hopes; should we not *keep ourselves in the love of God*^h, and by prayer cherish every virtuous disposition? Thus we should by prayer and supplication give God the honour of our dependance, and we shall feel the pleasure of a good confidence and hope. Here then is a rational ground of prayer, which is as proper an acknowledgment of the sovereignty and all-sufficiency of God, with respect to our future wants; as thanksgiving is of his goodness, with respect to former benefits.

3.) *Diffusive bounty and goodness* is another indisputable reason for the worship of God. Those innumerable blessings we receive, call for some requital; but as we can bestow no benefit upon God, the least expected from us is to be thankful; to extol, and magnify his kindness. God has distinguished us among the crea-

E

tures,

tures, by ranking us in the scale of intelligent beings, and furnishing us with excellent powers. Such powers as enable us to reflect upon the pleasures of existence; to view the beauty and order, and ends of things; to discern the differences of truth and error, good and evil, virtue and vice, and refer them to the plan of personal happiness. Such excellence as is a divine ray, the image of our Creator, the seal of his propriety in us, so that we cannot alienate ourselves from him, without doing what is unnatural, as well as ungrateful. God has placed us here at the head of the creation; made us wiser than the fowls of the air, and beasts of the field, and therefore expects a nobler tribute from us, than them. They praise him indeed passively, as they are dumb representations of his divine skill, but men should render that praise vocal, and reflect the glories of creation back to the Creator in the homage of gratitude and admiration. 'T would be endless to recount the mercies of God. That we have a quiet habitation amidst men's contending passions and pursuits; that we breathe wholesome air, have food to nourish us, friends to comfort us, conveniences to raise us above want; success, credit, and a general ease: those advantages are all from God. We ascribe them to second causes, but when we come to examine things more nicely and exactly, we shall find they depend upon so many things out of our power, that God must be acknowledged and adored in all our enjoyments. — The Christian has nobler mercies to excite his gratitude, even unsearchable riches of grace. What thanks are due for the light, that has irradiated the most important truths; the love, that sent a kind instructor and Saviour; the life of immortality, that is designed to perfect our virtue and happiness. To be within the discovery and offer of those blessings, is an invaluable blessing; but to be interested in them, to have this light shine into us; this love to impress us; this life to animate our hopes, is a joy *inexpressible and full of glory*¹; something of heaven on earth. What creatures must we be, if

we

we live one day after another insensible of so much goodness? How worse than brutes, to stifle all sentiments of gratitude, and restrain prayer and praise before God? They shew something like gratitude for human care. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib*ⁱ. Heaven and Earth must testify their abhorrence of our ingratitude, if we refuse to worship the God of our mercies.

Thus considering what God is in himself, and how he stands related to us, we shall find ourselves indispensibly obliged to worship Him. If we refuse this so reasonable a service, we shall not act according to the truth of things; nor give him the glory due to his name. The same obligation will result from a view of our own nature and condition; which is the next thing to be considered.

ⁱ Isa. i. 3.





S E R M O N II.

The Nature, Obligation, and Benefit of
Publick Worship.

PSALM XXvi. 8, 9, 10.

*Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy
house, and the place where thine honour
dwelleth --- Gather not my Soul with
Sinners, nor my Life with bloody
Men :--- In whose hands is mischief,
and their right-hand is full of Bribes.*

RELIGION never calls us to any improper or unnecessary services : yet some in themselves are so excellent and noble, and afford so divine a pleasure, that barely to represent them, one would think, should be sufficient to recommend them. The worship of God is of this nature. A service that is both our interest and honour ; which, at the same time it employs the mind, improves and enlarges it. This is the duty I am recommending from this passage, in the following method.

I . . . To

I. . . To consider the nature of religious worship in general.

II. . . To prove the equity and reasonableness of it, especially in a publick manner.

III. . . To make some useful reflections on the whole.

I . I have considered the nature of religious Worship in general, and shewn that it consists in those sentiments and affections of soul, which we express in — *Adoration*, viz. the highest esteem and veneration of God . . . *Thanksgiving* and praise . . . *Love* . . . *Reverence* and godly fear — *Devotedness*, viz. Faith in God . . . *Hope* . . . *Trust* . . . *Professions* of an honest and chearful obedience. This is the proper worship of a rational creature, and fit to be offered to a spiritual nature. But then tho' this is to be principally regarded; yet external worship ought not to be neglected, because we must testify to others our piety; excite and animate theirs by our example. The other is the weightier matter, but this ought not to be left undone. Necessary it is, for the reasons above mentioned, but not necessary in one particular mode or fashion.

II. . . I proposed in the next place to prove the equity and reasonableness of it, especially in a publick manner. And so far I have gone in the proof, as to shew, that it results from the nature and perfections of God . . . His transcendant excellency and greatness. . . . His supreme dominion and providence . . . His diffusive goodness and bounty. — I proceed

SECONDLY; To deduce the same obligation from another source, namely, *the nature and condition of man*. If the reasoning under this head should, in some thoughts, run into that of the former, it will shew, *I hope*, a more natural connection between both; and offer this
pleasing

pleasing affecting truth, that the measures of God's glory, and our happiness are inseparable from one another. — That it is our duty to worship God, will appear, if we consider man

As a rational creature.

As a weak depending creature.

As an offending creature.

1.) *Let us consider man as a rational creature.* In this view he appears capable of such a service; has an understanding to form those sentiments worthy of God; an heart to cherish and warm those affections, and a tongue to make them vocal. From the capacity the Philosophers have inferred with good reason the obligation. They supposed the visible universe the temple of God, and man placed in it to offer, for himself and other creatures, the perpetual incense of praise and adoration. “For this end, tho’ raised from the dust, he was made with a lofty erect countenance, that viewing the heavens he might discover the existence of the supreme author: that in the exercise of his reason he might infer the end why he was placed here, not merely as a dweller, but a devout spectator of superior divine things: that this was his peculiar province, since no creature was capable of it but himself^a.” Man, no doubt, was made for some end. And what can we devise more noble and excellent, than to discover the great source of being, and celebrate his perfections so wonderfully displayed in the creation, *even his eternal power and godhead^b*. This must be the noblest exercise of our faculties, as it is doing honour to Him that gave them, and still sustains them; and as by frequent

^a Qui primum eos humo excitatos celsos et erectos constituit, ut deorum cognitionem, coelum intuentes, capere possent. Sunt enim e terra homines non ut incolae, atque habitatores, sed quasi spectatores superarum rerum, atque coelestium, quarum spectaculum ad nullum aliud genus animantium pertinet.

Cic. de Nat. Deor. ii. 56.

^b Rom. i. 20.

frequent contemplations of this amiable object; and repeated acts of gratitude directed towards it, we take the resemblance, and grow up to christian perfection. *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect* ^c. — The creatures about us all answer the end of their beings. The sun shines, the rain falls, the year turns round, through all its agreeable vicissitudes, according to the ordinance of God. *Seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night never cease* ^d. And shall man presume to deviate from his sphere, and refuse the honours of his Maker? Shall he remain silent, when all the creatures offer perpetual motives to praise? His glory shines in the heavens; his goodness rises up in all the productions of nature, and should not man bless the Lord, the original Proprietor, and great Benefactor? Should not man worship God, when the invitation is so general, and the interest so personal; when every creature seems to inculcate his duty in this divine language, *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, for his wonderful works to the children of men* ^e.

2.) *Man is a weak depending creature*, and consequently will be prompted to lean somewhere. But where can he do it with so much reason and expectation as upon God? Not to own our indigence, must shew that we are great strangers to ourselves. Numerous are the evils and distresses, which encompass the paths of life. Those that are at a distance we cannot always foresee; and those that are near we cannot always prevent, or remedy. Ardent wishes, craving desires perpetually rise up within us, which we cannot satisfy; an unexpected difficulty intervenes and prevents enjoyment. From such a condition of being, nothing can be more evident than this, *that man is not sufficient for his own happiness*. And where shall he look for succour? If to man, he is equally imperfect with himself. By uniting into societies, we secure ourselves pretty well against the violent and lawless passions of others; but not against natural

^c Matt. v. ult.

^d Gen. viii. 22.

^e Psal. cvii. 31.

natural imperfections. Look where we please, we cannot find any supports of this frail life equal to those of a wise and gracious providence. Happy for us that we are under the care of heaven; and can ask of God aids and comforts superior to every difficulty. He can certainly *do more for us than we can ask or think*^f, and he can certainly do more against us than we can possibly fear. In all reason therefore we ought to make him our friend, in whom we shall have a kind, constant, and all-sufficient friend: One who will never desert any, who do not first desert him, and themselves. To own God what he is, able and willing to help us, must be our duty, and consequently we ought to pray unto him. Prayer is no other than the language of our indigence, and an acknowledgment of God's all-sufficiency, and shall we refuse this homage? It is an acknowledgment that we expect, he should, in our case, act agreeable to the connection he has established between his favour and virtue; between holiness and happiness, and is not this giving him the glory due to his wisdom and goodness in such appointments? Prayer therefore, which is so considerable a part of worship, is our duty, and the exhortation to it is founded in the reason and fitness of things: *in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known your requests unto God*^g.

3.) *Man is an offending creature*; and every serious recollection of this nature must deject and terrify. A fear of punishment follows a sense of guilt, as constantly as the shadow follows the substance. The awakened soul will be cast down at the view of its own sinfulness; its peace will be disconcerted, and its expectations dreadful. Men of all countries and ages have felt the pain and power of natural conscience; and therefore it cannot be the effect of institution only.—Now what must a sinner do in such a case, must he dwell upon the painful thought; go on to sin, to fear and

^f Eph. iii. 20. ^g Philip. iv. 6.

and despair?— No— a gleam of hope issues from the divine mercy and patience. Men hope there is some method of being reconciled to God, and restoring the peace of their minds. They have generally been mistaken in the way, and invented the various rites of superstition for this end. But those things have only palliated the case, and deceived the conscience. The most likely method of obtaining divine favour is by a sincere repentance and amendment; *a broken spirit and a contrite heart are sacrifices*^h most likely to be acceptable to God. What reason shews to be probable; Christianity offers as certain. This was the doctrine, *repentance and remission of sins, that was to be preached in Christ's name among all nations*ⁱ.— A mind conscious of sin ought to humble itself before God, and by a full *confession of it to give him glory*^k: the glory of his omniscience, power, holiness, and infinite hatred of sin. Penitency in such a light is a real instance of filial awe, and pious reverence; and a proper act of religious worship. The penitent sinner lays himself prostrate at the feet of forgiving mercy; pouring out there the sorrows of his soul; acknowledging the demerit of his sin; imploring forgiveness, and solemnly promising to offend no more. This is a thing meet and reasonable in itself, and the just homage of a sinful creature returning to the favour of God. In this way his infinite purity is honoured; and adored; as truly as his goodness, by our praises. This added to all the former reasons for the worship of God (unless we think we can live without sin) confirms the obligation; and leaves no room to evade so important, and immutable a principle.

Thus much to prove the equity and obligation of worship in general. The same reasoning may be applied to private or publick occasions. In either case the nature of worship will be the same; and the same sentiments and affections should rise up in the mind. There will therefore be less need to enlarge on the obligation

F

Of

^h Psal. li. 17.

ⁱ Luke xxiv. 47.

^k Josh. vii. 19.

Of Publick Worship.

However give me leave to offer a few thoughts in support of it, on the principles of publick justice, gratitude, and benevolence.

FIRST; Publick Worship is necessary to preserve the notion of God in the world. We are too apt to forget him both from the cares and vanities of life; and our many engagements, more agreeable to animal nature. Those who are enslaved by their lusts will avoid thoughts of him, and all occasions which lead to them, that they might have as little interruption and disturbance, as possible, in their way. At length by such an affected disuse, their temper becomes stupid and atheistical; *God is not in all their thoughts*¹. By assembling ourselves together in a publick manner, and confessing him before men, we keep up a good face of religion, and proclaim to all the world that there is a God, worthy of our highest honour and veneration. The seeing persons going, and coming from places of worship, will be a standing reproof to those who neglect it. And possibly may raise in them a train of thoughts, as might induce them to an imitation. The light of this good work may shine, and flash upon the dark, insensible heart; and even dispose it to own and glorify God in the same manner. So far then as we neglect this duty, we are wanting to support the first principle of all religion, the being of God. And do we consider what the consequence of this must be? Once a sense of God is banished from the world, the most sacred ties, the firmest bands of society, must be weakened. The authority of conscience; the obligations of oaths; the horrors of guilt must lose much of their force. And therefore when men are prosecuted for capital crimes, it is justly supposed in the indictment, that *they had not the fear of God before their Eyes*. If then it is our duty to preserve a sense of God in the world, it must be our duty to promote

¹ Psal. x. 4.

promote so natural a means of supporting it, as publick worship.

SECONDLY; Publick Worship *has a direct and natural tendency to promote a virtuous mind*, and so far it must conduce to an easy and useful life. By frequent approaches to God, an awe of Him, and submission to Him will become familiar to us. The constant acknowledgment of his authority, in those places, will go with us out of them, and will be likely to remain with us a powerful restraint on many dangerous occasions: for it must appear a shocking absurdity to honour him here, and offend him every where else. So, *again*, in adoring God it is our duty to approach him with humility, meekness, and submission, which are all virtues of peace. And it is reasonable to think, that by exercising them in the Church towards God, we shall be more ready to practise them in the world towards men. This would be no other than to make our character consistent, and uniformly virtuous. If then a virtuous mind is the right temper for the worship of God, it must consequently be promoted by it, and prepare us to enter every relation and office of life with advantage, till we come to practice, what we pray for under civil government, *a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty* ^m.

THIRDLY; *Benevolence should also lead us to publick exercises of religion*. Man is a creature formed by nature for mutual converse, and furnished with kind propensions and affections, which incline him to wish well to his fellow-creatures; and consequently he will unavoidably interest himself in publick happiness. The very same principles will carry him to support publick devotions, as a means to promote universal virtue and publick good. Men unite in society to guard against natural evil; from the same motives they should unite in religious societies, for preventing moral evil. And we find in the most antient History we have, that

F 2

their

their association for the worship of God was earlier than upon any civil account. *Then began men to call upon the name of the Lordⁿ.* When many hearts are united, and many hands are lifted up, God is the more magnified. The number of the worshippers exalts the praise, and encourages the hope of a sure protection. When *David* proposed the most solemn act of gratitude, it was *in the great congregation^o.*—Many concurring in the same work, will naturally inspire each other with confidence and hope; excite more lively affections and devout thoughts: so readily flame communicates itself to flame. Let us thus consult our own breasts, and we shall find a prompter to worship, from the love we bare to others. *Forasmuch as they are the offspring of God^p,* as well as ourselves; as they are encompassed with the same infirmities and dangers, we would lead them to the same supports, encourage them in the same goodness and protection; and in their prosperity find a good share of our own.

FOURTHLY; Publick Worship is necessary to *testify our national gratitude and dependance.* There are blessings adapted to societies, as well as private persons; and certainly those that have a general influence require a publick acknowledgment. Such are the preservation of peace and order amidst so many contending interests; the restraints of violent and unruly passions; the interweaving men's personal interest and safety with the observance of laws; the sending good Princes, who have no desire of power, but what is legal, no ambition of glory, but what results from the ease and prosperity of their subjects; the raising up true Patriots in times of publick danger; trade flourishing, peace abounding, and a respectable influence and authority with neighbouring states. Those are all favourable events to societies, and many times so surprizing, that we cannot avoid seeing his hand in them, *by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree justice^q;* by whom their throne

ⁿ Gen. iv. 26.
Prov. viii. 15.

^o Psal. xxii. 25.

^p Acts xvii. 29.

thrones are render'd safe, and their deliberations free. And are there no publick thanks due for those blessings? We see the burdens and cares of government, and should we not unite *our supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, for Kings, and for all that are in authority* ^r? We sit down under our vines with safety, and enjoy the fruits of our labour with freedom, and should we not pray for the continuance of this happiness? Should we not offer the most ardent wishes for the prosperity of our country, our favour'd *Jerusalem*, saying, *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces* ^s? Especially when we have the unmolested possession of the true religion, that invaluable blessing, and can add, *because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good* ^t.—— Societies may be brought into dangerous circumstances from rebellion or war. Is it not then a proper time to ask counsel of God; to beg with united hearts, *as having but one interest and cause*, direction in our measures, success to our arms, and *that he would not remove away the speech of the trusty, and take away the understanding of the aged* ^u? Is it not then a reasonable thing to humble ourselves for our sins, which justly provoke God's anger, and might cause him to bring a cloud upon our glory, and even give us up to the pride and power of our determin'd enemies. 'Tis fit we should deplore those judgments, and avert divine anger by our humblest prostrations, and vows of better obedience.—— Thus if we consider the share we have in the blessings of society, we should think ourselves obliged to bare our part in the humiliation or the praise. If the publick is in disorder and confusion, no man's private fortune can be secure. By all the love, *therefore*, we bare our country, ourselves or posterity, we are indispensibly obliged to join with some society or other in the publick worship of God: I don't mean occasionally only, on *Thankssgiving* and *Fast-days*, but in a more stated manner. And then, as this proceeds from publick

^r 1 Tim. ii. 1.
^u Job xii. 20.

^s Psal. cxxii. 7.

^t ib. ver. 9.

lick affection, and shews a right disposition for improving publick blessings, we may hope that God will hear us, when we call upon him.

III. . . Having thus explained the grounds on which religious worship is founded, both in private and publick, I come in the last place, to consider what other truths stand naturally connected with this subject, for our use and direction.

1.) From hence it follows, that *common swearing is an insufferable rudeness and insult upon the great object of religion.* If we are under so many obligations to reverence God in worship, it must be proportionally wicked to reproach him in the world. By the commonness of the sin one might be tempted to think it a harmless thing; but it is really of an aggravated nature. Other sins strike at the justice and power of God obliquely; this flies directly in his face. Other sins are acts of disobedience, this of contempt. But who is it, that is the object of such rudeness? No other than the greatest and best of Beings. And can it be supposed, that we should long preserve an esteem for the person, when his name is used with so much levity, and mingled upon all occasions with the low, mean, impure images of a trifling conversation? No one can imagine, that they should have much religion themselves, who can thus wantonly shake the foundations of all religion.—It further aggravates this sin, that it is without provocation on God's part. He is in nothing injurious to us; in nothing makes light of us and our concerns: on the contrary he is kind, patient, and merciful. What ingratitude then must we be guilty of? 'Tis a sin without temptation on our part. Pleasure or profit are the usual baits to other sins, but here is neither. What a contemptible weakness then must there appear in it? To excuse this sin from the violence of anger, is only to make one sin a reason for another; and to plead habit and custom is no other

other than to say, it was once our choice and delight, or it could never become so habitual, that we fall into it, abuse and vilify the God of heaven, without thinking. *In fine*, 'tis a sin that bids defiance to an express commandment of God. *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain* ^u. Here is a law solemnly established for preserving God's honour; and here is a vengeance to guard it, that is enough to make the breakers of it tremble.

2.) We see how wicked a thing it is *to compel men to external religion in any one particular form*. The worship fit for God, who is a spirit, to accept, is that of the mind: and the mind cannot be forced without destroying its liberty, and *consequently* the morality and virtue of its religion. The outward act indeed may be compelled; but then it must be to the prejudice of true religion: for it will be made a sign of what it is not, and serve to establish nothing but hypocrisy in the world. To force men to express that reverence, which they have not; or in such a manner, as they abhor, must destroy the life, spirit, and reality of all devotion. A statue is as capable of such a forced reverence, as a rational creature; and both may be equally stupid. It is more agreeable to the nature of religion, and the eternal rule of equity^x, to let men testify their reverence of God in their own way. Should it be supposed an absurd or weak one, yet that will not authorize any to violate their natural right and Christian liberty.——Compulsion in religion is injurious to God, as it robs him of a rational and virtuous service, *i. e.* a service, which is the effect of judgment and choice. It is injurious to man, as it will not permit him to conduct the most important affair of his life, and for which nobody is accountable but himself. One man thinks it best to express his veneration of God by the gesture

^u Exod. xx. 7.

^x And as you would that men should do unto you, do ye also to them likewise. Luke vi. 31.

of standing in worship; another thinks it a more decent expressive posture, to kneel; a third, that vestments of a particular form and colour, postures shifted and often changed, reverences made towards particular objects and places, Churches magnificently adorned with lamps, images, and curious gildings are proper significations or concomitants of religious worship. Suppose now one of those should be of opinion, that if the other will not comply with his notion and form, they ought to be either restrained in their civil rights, or fined and imprisoned, or possibly deprived of life, would it not be a monstrous thing? Suppose at the same time, all those should be so intent and zealous for their particular modes of outward worship, as to neglect their hearts, and be utter strangers to those sentiments and affections, which are essential to devotion. What must Angels think of all such pretences? The supposition is not improper, when we see things carried to such a length in the Church of *Rome*. Where for the sake of decency and order, and the exercise of Church authority, they commit the most indecent, violent, and inhuman things in the whole world.

3.) It follows in connection with the same principles, that if men ought to worship God in such manner as they think most acceptable to him, then *their places of worship, intended for God's honour and service, should be free from all violence*. If God is concerned for the interest of publick religion, he will regard the natural circumstances attending it, of time and place. And consequently must look upon a restraint laid on the one, a real instance of disaffection to the other. — It has been observed, that even among the heathen, God has, “ for the sake of religion in general, been pleased in an extraordinary manner to execute vengeance upon those who have plundered and demolished Temples, how false and idolatrous that particular religion was, for which they were erected ” The reason of this procedure, I suppose, was, because a worship that is wrong

wrong is better than none at all. It served to keep up some reverence of superior beings, and was a publick acknowledgment of men's gratitude and dependence.—How much more must this hold, where men worship the same true God, through the same mediator, and on the same foundations of faith and hope. A difference in outward forms, alterable in their own nature, will not make a different religion. And consequently, when such violence is offered to places, where the true God is worshiped, and the true religion professed, it must be an indignity offered to God himself, and an undoubted act of impiety².

G

4.) The

² I make no scruple to say, the Papists would be entitled to a toleration, would they be peaceable in their profession, and loyal to their Prince. This, if we may judge from past transactions, their Religion will not permit. Not the *first*, because their zeal in making proselytes, believed to have some extraordinary merit in it, renders them active and intermeddling. Their processions with the Host prove very incommodious to those they meet; it being expected, that men, on the knee, should pay their reverences to the priests, and the *idol* they carry. Both those attachments must affect publick peace and commerce in a Protestant country. Not the *second*; because they depend upon a foreign head, namely the Pope, in whom they believe a power is lodged of absolving men from the oaths of allegiance to heretical, *i. e.* Protestant Princes. The restraint therefore, which such are now under, is not because their religion is different, false, or absurd; but because such principles are adopted by them, as are the natural sources of Rebellion.—The demolition of Abbies &c. at the Reformation cannot come within the force of the reasoning above. Because, 1.) Their case was justly cognizable by parliament. They had possessed themselves of the better half of the lands in this kingdom, and by a tenure that rendered them for ever *unalienable*. Such a constitution of lands, absolutely unalienable, is not consistent with the encouragements due to trade and commerce. After a fatiguing life of business the Merchant is willing to retire, and settle the fruits of his labour on some firm security. Land was always looked upon as such, especially in that period; but if this is not to be purchased, trade will want a proper encouragement, which brings in the materials of national riches, power, and greatness. Trade was under further discouragement from some of those religious houses. By their immense revenues, they had money always at command, tho' it was scarce every where else. They employed it in stocking farms, in keeping tan-houses, and brewhouses, and very likely would have brought all trade

4.) The duty of Publick Worship being founded on such clear incontestible principles, it must follow, *that no excuse for our non-attendance can avail us, but such as necessity or charity shall suggest.* But then we should take care, that we do not *make* those, but *find* them; least under those pretences we should shelter criminal prejudices, and real disaffection to the service of God. Such pretences may possibly screen us from the censures of men, but not from the knowledge and judgment of God. Necessity and charity cannot be supposed to engage us always at the time of publick worship. Something else *therefore* must be the real ground of

trade into their own hands. To prevent the spread of such an evil, an act was made in the 21st of *Hen. 8. Fuller C. Hist. B. vi.*

2.) Their revenues were not applied to those uses, intended by the donors; but in a quite different manner; to support pride, idleness and luxury. Some of them were made sanctuaries, to which villains often fled, and were protected from publick justice. And most of them were found to be nurseries of abominable lewdness, to the dishonour of all Religion. The *Commons* complained of them in *Hen.* the 4th's time; and renewed this complaint in his successor's reign, *Hen.* the 5th. This was long before the demolition took place. *Rapin, Vol. 1. p. 500, 509.*

3.) A Pope and a Cardinal began the demolition of those houses. Forty lesser monasteries were suppressed by Cardinal *Woolsey*, with the license of Pope *Clement* the 7th on pretence of founding a College. *Rapin, Vol. I. p. 768.*

4.) The way of obtaining those houses and revenues was many times the most iniquitous that can be imagined. When Princes and great men had committed any flagrant crimes, for which their consciences accused them. The way of atonement and absolution was by such edifices and endowments. When persons of a lower rank were in the agonies of conscience and death, a priest was ready to suggest, that all might be render'd easy and safe, by an handsome legacy to the Church. The lowest sort of people were encouraged to give their labour, on the promise of pardons, indulgencies, and present meals. So that we can look upon such religious houses no other than as monuments of the most dreadful delusion. Those houses then were demolished, not to suppress the worship of God; not to prevent the worshippers from serving him according to their consciences, for that they had opportunities of doing around them, and in their own way; but it was because they were absolute nuisances in Church and State. And it deserves to be remembered, that, before the demolition, there was scarce an Abbey in *England*, but had been burnt down by lightning from heaven. *Fox.* And since the demolition the nation never appeared more rich, powerful and flourishing.

of our neglects; but I cannot imagine any thing excepting necessity and mercy, of equal moment with the reasons before assigned.— Can we better employ our time at home, than in publickly exalting the author of our beings, and exciting our Souls to sublime heights of reverence and love? It is too mean and abject a thing to suppose, that we find more satisfaction in smothering ourselves in a bed of down, or that we can take more pleasure in soothing our flesh with softness and ease.—The fatigue of business, we imagine, require some relaxation, and so it does, provided it does not interfere with a more essential business. To take an airing, or amuse ourselves in the garden or the field is agreeable. But why should we indulge this pleasure, when an opportunity offers of worshipping God? Is not the prosperity of our Souls, of more consequence than the refreshments of our bodies? Does it not import us more to please; than neglect God, upon whose favour the success of business; the continuance of health and comfort so much depend.—Possibly we know not how to join in the usual forms of Worship, without meeting with such representations of the Father of mankind, as are shocking; without having such ideas of virtue and religion raised, as are unworthy the author or end of religion. I would by no means patronize any corruptions in Religion; yet I am sensible how easy it is to aggravate matters beyond the truth, and give an objection a formidable appearance, when we have no mind to do a thing. I wish there had been no ground for the Observation of a learned and worthy Prelate, “that it has never gone well with the Church
“ of Christ, since men have been so narrow spirited
“ as to mix the controversies of Faith with their publick Forms of Worship; and have made their liturgies, instead of being offices of devotion to
“ God, become tests and censures of the opinion of
“ their Brethren.”^a However it may possibly reconcile us to some difference of sentiments, to con-

G 2

sider,

^a Wake.

sider, that if they are not imposed, and made tests of communion, we may still preserve our liberty and integrity. Charity will suggest a kind thought on this occasion, that men may be honest, though they are mistaken; and Charity mingling with our devotion will always render it a more acceptable sacrifice to a God of love^b. But after all, does it not seem strange, that amidst a variety of Christian Churches there should not be *one*, that we could harmonize with in their manner of Worship? Is there no reason to suspect some partiality in our enquiries, or some peculiarity in our temper, that we seem to think of being pious and happy by ourselves.—We may say as to publick instruction, that we know as much as we can be told. This may be very true, and yet no reason for neglecting Publick Worship. We come not to such places to learn novel and curious opinions; but to honour God, and to have *our minds stirred up by way of remembrance*^c. The best furnished mind is not so equally attentive in all seasons, as to want no admonition; nor the strongest virtue so perfect, as to be above advice and encouragement. Our unavoidable engagements with sensible objects make it necessary sometimes to call off our thoughts, and by occasional exercises of piety to maintain that lively sense of our dependance, that holy ardour, that grateful veneration we owe to God, and hereby prevent our sinking quite into animal life.—I can think but of one thing more, which might be supposed to be urged with some colour of reason against Publick Worship, namely, that there is no ground for prayer. “That all events were designed and provided for in the original constitution of things, and consequently are produced by stated and regular laws in which prayer can make no alteration.” I know not whence it is, that a doctrine of FATE, in some shape or other, should find advocates in all ages. A doctrine full of confusion and darkness; unsuitable to the

the character of a moral governour ; and infinitely discouraging to the governed. According to this doctrine, when I am in distress, and naturally look up to God, as one able and willing to help me, yet I have no encouragement to hope that he will. The force of this objection has, I hope, been already considered and removed^c. But I beg leave to ask, whether we must not suppose it a part of this original constitution, *that there should be a connection between virtue and happiness* ? If so, I may pray to God for a virtuous mind^d, to dispose me for this happiness, unless moral actions are also necessary, and unavoidable. Is it not likewise a part of this original constitution, *that divine favours should be shewn to none, but those who have a just value for them ; and would make a good use of them* ? And is not prayer, sincerely and solemnly addressed to God, the way to get such a right temper of mind. — Nothing of this nature will, I conceive, justify our neglects of publick worship. The reasons therefore before given, remain in their full force and obligation.

5.) And *lastly*, it becomes us, who own the obligation, to review our conduct ; and remember, with concern, if we have at any time been too little sensible of the great and glorious object of worship, and too little affected with the infinite obligations we are under to it, and even when our dependance upon it is so absolute and entire. *To come to God as the people cometh, and sit before him as his people, and hear his words ; but not do them : with our mouth to shew much love, but our hearts going after our covetousness^e : is a degenerate character, and which we have reason to blush at any approaches to ; because it is a character that has a mixture in it of ingratitude and contempt. Let it grieve*

^c Vid. ante p. 22—25.

^d Nil ergo optabunt homines ? — — —

Orandum est, ut sit mens sana in corpore sano.

Juv. x. 346. 356.

Vid. Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. i. 2,

^e Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

grieve us to have performed any acts of adoration and worship, with so little intention and earnestness of mind; with so little zeal and fervency of affection; with so little humility and prostration of spirit: that we have too negligently improved the aids of Grace, and too faintly pursued the Glories of the upper World: that we have missed any opportunities of honouring God, when the invitation has been fair, and perhaps nothing but softness and indulgence prevailed against our duty. The review of those things will better acquaint us with ourselves, and excite us to more devout exercises of Piety.

Be *exhorted* then to make the Worship of God your stated solemn practice. What you have so many obligations to do, and no excuse for leaving undone, should easily determine you. 'Tis his honour I plead, who made, and continually preserves you. 'Tis your benefit I aim at, that you might enter into the pleasure and confidence of a divine friendship. I exhort you to that, which is not beneath the majesty of a Prince, or dignity of an Angel. To do that for which you were sent into the World; and indeed without which all you do besides is impertinent.

Worship God. Let us meet the occasion with a joyful heart: *I was glad when he said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord^f. Let us enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise^g. There let holy thoughts, and devout aspirations of soul possess us. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauties of holiness^h. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts: who givest grace and glory, and withholdest no good thing from them that walk uprightlyⁱ. When thus we are employed in the exercises of gratitude, faith, trust, and pious reverence, we shall be satisfied with the goodness of his house^k. We shall carry something of the pleasure with us into the World,*

and

^f Psal. cxxii. 1.

^g Psal. c. 4.

^h Psal. xcvi. 8, 9.

ⁱ Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 11.

^k Psal. lxxv. 4.

and retain a delightful sense of past enjoyments. *A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness¹.*

The effect of this address will be, I hope, to raise your esteem of divine worship, and engage you in so useful and delightful a practice. But *then* we must take this along with us, if we desire it should be a means of real religion, that our worship of God should be accompanied with sincerity, decency, and rectitude of mind and manners. — We must be *fin-*
cere, i. e. our external acts of worship must be true expressions of our inward reverence and devout temper. We are in a presence that cannot be deceived with outward shews and forms; and there is no hiding ourselves from him behind a religious face. The service must be entirely rational; be directed by our understandings; accompanied with our affections; and elevated to a degree of supreme reverence and love. Without this, bodily worship is no more than superstition. *My son give me thy heart^m.* — We must be *decent* in our outward behaviour. A trifling air; a roving eye; a careless or sleepy posture too often betray an absent mind, or a vain one: both equally disdained by an omniscient God. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of foolsⁿ.* — We must worship God with *rectitude of mind and manners*. We must be free from the love of moral evil; from any just imputations of fraud, injustice, cruelty, and oppression. Those are so hateful to the God we serve, that it will turn praise into a more solemn insult, and prayer into an abomination. *I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord^o.*

This then is the worship of God in spirit and truth, and unalterably founded in the nature and reason of things. The Philosophers, who distinguished between religion

¹ Psal. lxxxiv. 10.

^m Prov. xxiii. 26.

^o Eccl. v. 1.

ⁿ Psal, xxvi. 6.

religion and superstition, recommend "as the best, the purest, the holiest, the most devout worship of the Gods; that which proceeds from a pure, sincere, unpolluted mind, and a voice that is the true index of the heart." The divine Plato says, "The nature of God was such, as not to be influenced and biassed by the most costly gifts. — That to suppose him paying a greater regard to those things, than to justice and sanctity of mind, was abominable, &c. — That when the oracle was consulted on this case, why the Athenians, who offered more and richer sacrifices than others, and adorned the temples of their Gods with the utmost magnificence and pomp; should be always worsted, by sea and land, by the Lacedemonians: the answer given was, that the acclamation, *i. e.* prayer *ἐν τῷ θυμῷ αὐτῶν* was more pleasing than all the sacred rites, and ceremonious pomp of the other Grecians." Those were the sentiments of the wisest Heathens, and which they embraced as just and rational principles.

We have a more divine philosophy to instruct us, which has represented God to us, as an object most worthy our veneration, and directed us to a service most suitable to his spirituality and dignity. I might have supported the duty of publick worship by the authority, examples, promises, and peculiar encouragements of the Christian Religion. But as those things are supposed to be well known, I thought it might be of use to establish it, as a duty of natural religion. — I beg leave to close the subject with the following

Motives.

¶ *Cultus autem deorum, est optimus, idemque castissimus, atque sanctissimus, plenissimisque pietatis, ut eos semper pura, integra, incorrupta et mente et voce veneremur. Non enim philosophi solum, verum etiam majores nostri superstitionem a religione sepeverunt.*

Cic. de Nat. Deor. ii. 28.

¶ *Plato Alcibiad. ii. 9, 10. Edit. Cantab. 1683.*

Motives.

1.) *The neglect of publick worship has a very bad tendency to corrupt the morals of a Nation.* Persons used to contemplation and abstractions of mind, may find in themselves a spring of pious thoughts and reflections; but is there no regard due to the weaknesses of others? Have we not so much compassion and humanity, as to encourage a practice which tends so directly to the bettering mankind? Supposing a few, from the impressions of education, and a taste for books, may possibly preserve their virtue irreproachable; yet generally, I fear, the effect is quite otherwise. Can less be expected, when men throw off such awful principles; when they neglect the opportunity of actuating them in the worship of God? Must not this be the natural consequence, that they will be under less restraint from sin. *The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom**; but if this be weakened, it will be found true in fact, that the fear of man, and the fear of laws, will be less able to controul the passions of mankind: nay the force of every secret temptation will be so much the stronger. If publick virtue then deserves our regard, publick worship will deserve our countenance and encouragement.

2.) *This will be an evidence of our uprightness before God.* From what has been observed, it must appear a thing, which God wills, and is pleased with; *he loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*†. And consequently our diligent observance of it must shew in us, a real conformity to the will of God. Those exercises of our reverence, gratitude and dependance, will discover a good affection to the whole design of Religion. That we love its purity, submit to its authority, and desire nothing more than to be transformed into the image of the object we adore. Now so far as our integrity appears, so much will our pleasures

H

* Psal. cxi. 10.

† Psal. lxxxvii. 2. Zion was the place where the Temple stood.

pleasures be enlarged. *Our rejoycing is this, the testimony of our conscience*.*

3.) And lastly; in the conscientious worship of God, *we may indulge the hope of his future favour*. Futurity is a dark and doubtful prospect. We know not what events may rise up to affect us, and therefore it must be a mighty satisfaction in this uncertainty, to have some ground of hope. The worshippers of God, I conceive, may pretend to this.

FIRST, the hope of success in their private affairs. He that has all hearts in his hands; and all creatures at his beck, can so dispose of their affections, as to procure us esteem; and turn even enmity into love. *When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes his enemies to be at peace with him*†. How easy must it be for God, by the secret imperceptable ways of his providence, to direct the train of our affairs, so as to end in some suitable benefit and comfort; Those that exalt God, and do what has a tendency to preserve in the World a sense of his being and providence; the basis of life, and incentive to great, noble, and hazardous enterprises, those, I say, may well indulge such expectations, it being agreeable to a measure, which God himself has established, *them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed*‡.

SECONDLY; the hope of protection from public enemies. Princes led by their ambition and lust of power, will give continual disturbance to their neighbours. *Glory* is their aim; but 'tis a false one, that tramples upon liberty and right, that disdains the kind and benevolent passions, and covets to appear a shining gaudy object, and dread of mankind. Such an Enemy we have had in the French court, I cannot say the French nation, because 'tis to be presumed they would follow the biases of nature and

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† Prov. xvi. 7.

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

and interest, were it not for the united tyranny of the Church and Crown. Next to no enemy at all, the most desirèable thing is to have a fair and honourable one: but this we cannot expect from the French Court, if we may judge from the transactions of an age past. This is the Enemy that has disturbed the repose of Europe; levied war against all colour of right and justice; and demonstrated this to be the sole object of their attention, *universal monarchy*.—The character of David's enemies in this Psalm suits them with great propriety.

Is there not too much cause for calling them *bloody men*? When they are so insensible to the persecutions and murders of their Protestant subjects, and inspired to it with such rage and cruelty by their religion: insensible to the miseries and groans of their country, which their own tyranny occasions; insensible at the effusion of blood in all their wars; wantonly throwing away men's lives, to carry a point, as if they were among the meanest of the brute creation.—Their heads and *bands are full of mischief*; ever restless, ever devising new troubles to their neighbours, and meditating new conquests. They are not to be held by ties of honour or justice, or the most sacred pledge of Publick Faith. Witness their infractions of treaties upon the most frivolous pretences; their evasive constructions, and artful distinctions between the letter and the spirit of established treaties.—But they shine in the latter part of the character, *their right hand is full of bribes*. This is their strength and dexterity; this the basis of all their glory.—In the *field* they have not trusted to numbers, or valour, till corruption has in part tied up the hand of the enemy, and prostituted their honour and their virtue: then there is a way made for the ardor of their troops, and the rapidity of their victorious arms.—'Tis bribery has made their army successful, even when beaten; and their treaties advantageous, even when in despair. UTRECH can witness this. The glory, they are so full of on all occasions, is raised upon the ruins of

virtue; on the falshood, perjury, and treason, which they have purchased among their enemies. This has been their invariable scheme, for a century past, to corrupt the manners and politicks of all they have had any correspondence with. A formidable enemy indeed! but for nothing so much as this, that *their hands are full of bribes*. But we trust, they will now meet with an effectual repulse, from the integrity, honour, and resolution of the *Present Administration*; and that we shall once more be able to prescribe measures to their *ambition*, and prevent the impression of those ill practices and false colours, which are so natural to them. — We have felt the mischief in the factions, in the rebellions, which they have spirited up amongst us. And the best use, we can make of it, is, to express our detestation and abhorrence of the means they so liberally use, namely *bribery and corruption*. This confounds the nature of good and evil; extinguishes all sentiments of honour and gratitude; overcomes the love of our country, and turns Patriotism into a hated Faction. As *this* advances and spreads in any State, publick trusts will be betrayed; the rewards of merit will be misplaced, and Liberty with all her train of blessings must decline and fall.

Let us take care to honour and please God, and we need not fear what those our enemies can do against us by fraud or force. Hitherto God has protected us against all their power. He has saved us in critical conjunctures; accepted our humiliations, answered our prayers, and *delivered us from our enemies*. His *End* is the best improvement we can make of those kind providences, *to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the Days of our life*. But if we neglect what he designed to bring us to, and despise his publick honours, we may well fear that scourge which has been so often shook over us, *Arbitrary Power*; and expect to feel that curse, which is daily spreading its roots, *Papery in all its terrors*. Those are the plagues, which

which our enemies have been ever preparing for us; and some are so very weak, as to countenance and wish for a *Power*, that will crush them and all their fortunes in the end.

From the highest to the lowest *then* let us encourage a national piety. 'Tis a duty will do us honour; a duty not below the dignity of the greatest mortal, for it is to worship the infinite, eternal God. How inconsiderable must the greatest monarch appear in the scale of intelligent beings, who adore him? Angels and Archangels, Thrones, Seraphims and Cherubims, clothed with the purest light, and rayed with divine glory, lay their fairest honours at his feet. How unequal, how vastly inferior are the greatest of us in the comparison? How faint are the rays of a coronet, and the blaze of a crown in the lustre and glory of their Excellency? yet they worship God. A fair invitation to Kings and Nobles, and people of all ranks and degrees to do the same; and account their lowest submission a degree of honour; superior to titles and robes and empire.

Then we may hope that God will continue our national blessings, and preserve to us that excellent Prince on the throne, who has given unquestionable proofs of his Paternal Care, in the defence of us, against invading powers, and the constant preservation of all our rights and liberties. *Then* we may hope, that his Royal Descendants will succeed him, as the heirs of his publick virtues, as the guardians of our laws and liberties, and the glorious defenders of the Protestant Religion against the power of cruel, bloody, and perfidious enemies. *Which that is might be, till time shall be no more, may the Eternal God, whom we serve and adore, grant of his infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

S E R.

S E R M O N III.

The Grace, and Influence of Christ's
promise to Christian Churches.

M A T T. xviii. 20.

*Where two or three are gathered together
in my name, there am I in the midst
of them.*

THE holy Scriptures and other books differ much like the works of nature and art. The nearer view we take of the one the more blemishes and flaws we discover; the exacter inspection into the other shews them to more advantage. The light that makes them plainer, reveals new beauties, and renders them still more pleasing and wonderful. Though the Scriptures are a collection of writings, given in different and distant ages of the world, yet there is such a character of truth and holiness, which runs through them, as will be always a presumption in their favour, that they came from the fountain of unerring wisdom and truth. They are
besides

besides stored with such a rich variety of blessings, and pursue such a great and noble end, that all well-disposed minds must find a singular pleasure in them. The people of God have, in all ages, used them for their direction and comfort; they have valued them as their treasure, as institutes of the truest wisdom, because *they are able to make them wise unto salvation*.

The promises are so many points of lights in them, distinguished by their lustre. That which I have now read is both useful and pleasing, and designed to encourage our assemblies for religious purposes with the expectation of a divine presence and blessing. *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

In the beginning of this chapter, our Saviour, having discouraged all contests among his friends about pre-eminence and dignity, having declared persons of the greatest humility and innocence to be the truest members of his Church, proceeds to condemn all those who should distress and persecute them. He goes on to encourage tenderness and compassion among his friends, and directs them how to behave towards one another in case of scandal and offence. It begins at the ver. 15. — *First*, he commands them to admonish an offending brother in private, *i. e.* “in such a manner and with such gentleness, that it might appear, they aimed at his repentance and reformation, rather than to insult his weakness, or expose his character.” If this failed of success, they were to take two or three others to be witnesses of the charge and expostulation. And this proving ineffectual, they were to bring the matter before the Church, or Christian society. But if this was to no purpose, and he should remain obstinate under public censure and reproof, they were then to leave him as an incorrigible person; *not fine, imprison, and take away his life*, but consider him as a person to whom they owed *only* the common offices of humanity and life, and with whom they ought to have no communion in the ordinances of Religion. — After this

this he assures them, that if they proceeded in their censures according to those directions, with tenderness, impartiality and uprightness, what they did on earth should be confirmed in heaven. If for their better direction they should pray to God for assistance, they might expect to be heard and accepted. For in all cases they might depend upon his particular regard to their interest and prayers. *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* "Tho' never so small a congregation of you
 " my friends be assembled in my name, and accord-
 " ing to my appointment, whatever the special oc-
 " casion be, I will manifest my grace and favour to
 " you: regard your interest and prayers; assist your
 " worship, and promote all the religious purposes of
 " your assembling together." A most gracious and glorious promise. Wherever this assembly was held, in a mountain, a field, an upper room, or barn, the meanness of the place should be no obstruction to the divine presence and blessing. If it was an assembly in Christ's name, subject to his authority, conformable to his command, and directed to answer the purposes of his moral government and kingdom, they need not value the censures and reproaches of the world. The anger of men should not prevent the blessings of heaven.— So that the words plainly look further than the particular case of church discipline, which at first occasioned them, and may be considered as a most gracious encouragement to our frequenting publick assemblies for religious worship. The most convincing reasons prove it to be our duty; the most important blessings shew it to be our interest. In this latter respect I shall consider the words; and would

I. . . Enquire what we are to understand by this presence of Christ.

II. . . Shew the grace and glorious influence of this promise.

III. . . Conclude the subject with some suitable improvement.

The consideration of those points will offer the most interesting motive to the publick worship of God. This is the scene of light and comfort, the opportunity of grace; and therefore if we have any regard to our own advantage, it will induce us to love the habitation of God's house; the place where his honour dwells, and his favours are dispensed. It concerns us to live in the use of means, to lie by the pool's side, and wait for the divine blessing.

I. . . . I would enquire what we are to understand by *this presence of Christ, which is here promised to his churches*. No one can be so weak as to think any bodily presence, or visible appearance of his person is here intended. Ever since his Resurrection and Ascension he is constantly represented as absent, as one that is distant, *whom the heavens must receive, till the time of the restitution of all things*^b: And we are to remember him at his table, as one that lived and died, and ascended to a place out of the reach of our senses, from which we expect his descent and bodily appearance again. *Ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come*^c. Yet there is no impropriety in the manner of our Saviour's expression here. It is the stile of Majesty and Authority. *All power is given to me*, i. e. as mediator, *in heaven and earth*^d. He is Head of that society; King of that church, which assembles in his name; the medium of all worship, and the dispenser of all blessings; and therefore what is done by his order and dispensation, he may well assume personally to himself. He would have a kind regard to the assemblies of his people, and upon many occasions signally manifest his power and love, as really, as seasonably, as if he himself was visibly present in the midst of them. This language, for ought I know, may likewise be used in allusion to the presence of God

^a Acts. iii. 21.

^c 1 Cor. xi. 26.

^d Matt. xxviii. 18.

58 *The Grace &c. of Christ's promise*

God in the tabernacle and temple. There was a visible glory representing it, which appeared on the mercy-seat between the Cherubims. Towards this they worshipped God; they invoked him as dwelling there. *O thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth^e.* Here God promised his presence for protection, comfort, and blessing. *There will I meet thee and commune with thee^f.* Again, *In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and bless thee^g.* Of the temple God says, *I have chosen and sanctified this house, that my name might be there for ever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually^h.* Thus Christ speaks to his disciples, when he sent them forth to propagate his religion, tho' he was not to be personally with them in the execution of it. *Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations. . . and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the worldⁱ.*—The question then is, how Christ is in his church? that since he is not there bodily and visibly, what is it, that constitutes the virtue and power of his presence. And

1.) *His Ambassadors are in his Church.* They personate their Lord and Master, act in his name, and according to instructions received from him, or ought to do so. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost^k; Ministers are to pursue the same design, so far as it can lie within their province, i. e. by a faithful representation of the doctrines of the Gospel, and by an affectionate persuasion and entreaty of men to comply with the design of them. To them is committed, as a trust and treasure, the word of reconciliation, which they are to dispense with an impartiality, affection and zeal, becoming so great a concern. According to the measure of faith and knowledge, which they have attained themselves, they ought to deliver it fairly to others, and to make the New Testament the rule and extent of their commission, *not walking in craftiness.*

^e Psal. lxxx. 1. ^f Exod. xxv. 22. ^g Exod. xx. 24. ^h 2 Chron. vii. 16. ⁱ Matt. xxviii. 20. ^k Luke xix. 10.

craftiness, not handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. They have no dominion, or coercive power over the faith and consciences of others. Their authority is only declarative, hortatory, and ministerial: to be kind, benevolent and useful; which is as much power as any wise or good man would desire. In the exercise of this, they are in Christ stead; that since he is no longer conversing with men on earth, they are to supply the want of his personal ministry, by making an immediate and particular address to men in his name. They are to declare to *sinners* the terms of acceptance; to convince them of the necessity of repentance; to persuade and intreat them to be reconciled to God, and their own interest. *Now then we are Ambassadors for Christ, as tho' God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ stead, we press upon you the same design,* which he had in commission from his Father, *be ye reconciled to God^m.* They are to encourage and build up *good men* in their most holy faith; assist them in their duties; comfort them in their afflictions and trials; and help them forward in their way to heaven. —

Thus Ministers are to act for Christ, as shepherds to his flock; as stewards to his household; as agents in his kingdom. They are to make the external call, and personal application; and engage in the offices of religion, as Christ would have done, had he continued on earth. His Gospel is their commission, his glory, in the salvation of souls, is their end. As Princes are present in different places, by their Ambassadors and proxies, so is Christ present in his churches by his Ministers.

2. *His Ordinances are in his church:* Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are standing and visible tokens of divine goodness; the affecting memorials of Christ's Love; and the means of communion with him. — Baptism is a declaration of grace: for we are baptized

I 2

into

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 2.^m 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.

into the name of God as a Father, ever kind and merciful; into the name of Christ, as a Son and Saviour; and into the name of the Holy Ghost, as a guide, sanctifier and comforter. By this positive rite is published, and notified our interest in the rights, privileges and hopes of the Christian Church; and the obligation we are under to moral purity and righteousness, the end of our Saviours religion. — The Lord's Supper exhibits the same grace and good will; and offers to us the endeared pledges of Christ's love. It leads us to recollect the death which he suffered; the atonement which he made; the covenant which he sealed; his triumphs and rewards. It gives us an occasion to express our gratitude, admiration, and devotedness to him; and to approve of that holiness, which his doctrine, his life, and love require indispensably of us. As those ordinances represent to us the nature, excellency and end of the religion of Christ: or are memorials of his kind and generous concern for us; and consequently as he is more immediately present to our thoughts, and to the exercise of every grace, its object and spring; it may well be said that he is in his churches. A letter will in some measure supply the absence of a friend, and maintain a kind of conversation with him: so here every exhibition is a line of love.

3.) *His Spirit is in his Church.* This is more especially his Agent, to supply his absence, and carry on the same glorious work by internal influences on the mind. So he promised, *I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you*ⁿ; not personally, but by the effusion of the spirit, the spirit of truth and comfort, which he spoke of just before. The Spirit has accompanied all dispensations of religion. Under the Old Testament it was more eminently a spirit of prophecy. *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*^o. *The Spirit of Christ which was in them testified before.*

ⁿ John xiv. 16, 17, 18.

^o 2 Pet. i. 21.

before-hand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Under the New Testament, at its beginning, it was a spirit of extraordinary surprizing gifts, by which the word was confirmed, and the mission of the Apostles supported; by which they were encouraged, and emboldened against their own natural weakness and fear: but then those influences of the spirit were intended for the benefit of others, rather than of those who partook of them. There is besides the moral influence of the spirit, *whose fruits are in all goodness and righteousness, and truth*; and whose work is to restore light, rectitude and peace to the mind; and concur with the other means and instruments of religion to render them useful and effectual. The Old Testament Saints were not unacquainted with his holy aids; but it was more eminently promised and vouchsafed to the New. Good men were full of the Holy Ghost here, and their faith and piety were eminent, their mutual love exemplary, their fortitude invincible. *This is that spirit we are to be filled with*, as a duty; and to ask for, as a privilege. This is the wisdom from above, that makes us watchful; the power from on high that keeps us steadfast. If we consider only the eminent degrees of virtue and happiness to which we are called in the Christian Religion; and at the same time the general state of human nature, indolent, careless, and yielding to sensible impressions. If we consider how much some are prejudiced and enslaved by their lusts; how much others are discouraged and opposed in their virtues, we must think such divine aids necessary. What need of this spirit to brood on the chaos of some minds, to form them into light, beauty, and order; and to elevate others, amidst the impressions of a sensible world, to the sublime heights of purity, heavenly-mindedness, and supreme love! Thus Christ is present by his spirit in his churches, and makes an inward and immediate application to the souls of men. *He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall*

† 1 Pet. i. 11.
 † Luke xi. 13.

‡ Ephes. v. 9.

§ Ephes. v. 18.

show it unto you. This is a presence that we stand most in need of, and happy will it be for us, if this day we may feel its influence, and rejoyce in its power. — So that when we think of this passage of Christ's being in the midst of *assembled christians*, we must conceive of it in this manner; that his ministers will be with us to intreat us; his ordinances to entertain us; his spirit to assist the beginning, progress and perfection of our religion. — I proceed,

II. . . . *To show the grace and glorious influence of this promise*: which will at the same time demonstrate the intrinsic excellency and worth of the Religion we profess, and the goodness of the Master we follow.

First, *Let us consider the Grace of the promise here made*. Many words, I hope, are not necessary to evince this. For, if the duty, interest and perfection of man, as a moral agent, is virtue, or a conscious perception in ourselves of dispositions and actions morally good: then whatever carries us towards this end must be of the greatest consequence to us. In the present state of human nature, we find ourselves weak and impotent to good. What from the strength of animal passions; the early and continual impressions of a sensible World; we make but slow advances towards it. Our capacity does not appear proportional to our end; which would reflect upon the wisdom and goodness of our Creator, but that we must necessarily suppose some alteration has happened to disturb the original order of things, the Scriptures inform us how this came about; that human nature was corrupted in its natural source, fountain and head; and consequently, *that there is no bringing a clean thing out of an unclean*.

Now what a mercy and favour is it in those circumstances to be enabled to reach our end; to have our capacity enlarged in proportion to our duty; our minds assisted and raised above our difficulties and temptations.

temptations. Is not this rich distinguishing Grace? that such a merciful constitution should subsist for our sakes; that, when our Saviour had finished the work of our redemption on earth, he should leave his ministers to communicate the knowledge and benefit of it to all ages. *He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body, i. e. the Church, of Christ* *. By this means the outward calls to repentance will be continually renewed; men will not be permitted to continue in their security without admonition; or to indulge their criminal passions without warning of their sin and danger. By this means the faith and holiness of good men will be encouraged, seasonable counsels administered, and divine consolations offered. An institution every way worthy the wisdom of God, though it has been too often traduced, as the contrivance and craft of man. — There is likewise an internal call by the spirit of God; which can make men feel, if they will not hear. This is an excellent advantage, as it is an immediate application to the souls of men. In this way such thoughts are suggested to the careless, as shall tend to awaken them; such dangers objected to the obdurate, as may serve to terrify them; such comforts presented to the afflicted, as may revive and succour them. The spirit is before-hand with all in laying the foundation of Religion, and enriching those with further aids of his grace, who build upon that foundation. Sometimes preventing us from doing evil; at other times encouraging us in doing good. In the worship of God he helps our infirmities, animates our affections, and improves our good thoughts into good resolutions, and by his assistance we advance to a state of habitual goodness and piety. What a kind and seasonable provision is here made for us, and how thankful should we be for a promise, that is intended to derive such strength and comfort to us, saying with the Psalmist,

cast

* Eph. iv. 11, 12.

cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me¹.

SECONDLY ; Let us consider the *glorious influence* of this promise ; when it is more than ordinarily distinguishable in its effects. — But it ought to be considered here, that Christ, in the ways of his providence and grace, does not always *come with observation*². Generally he gently touches the heart, and leads us on to goodness by methods so agreeable to the operations of our own minds, that we can no more distinguish the one from the other, except by the effects, than discover the origin and retreats of the wind. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof ; but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whether it goeth : so is every one that is born of the spirit*³. This is the case of those who have been trained up in religious families, and accustomed early to the private and publick offices of piety. The instructions and examples about them have made the first impressions in favour of virtue, and they take such an easy gradual bend to religion, that they may not be able to say when it began. And indeed this is of no great consequence to be known, provided our present character be real, and our temper holy. Sometimes the manifestations of Grace are very observable. The means have been more than ordinarily successful ; the ordinances of religion entertaining ; the soul greatly raised and affected in devotion. I beg leave to illustrate this with regard both to good and bad men.

First, with regard to good Christians.

Although their regards to Christ are supposed to be always great ; and their experiences in religion always encouraging : yet sometimes the occasion has been distinguished,

¹ Psal. li. 11.

² Luke xvii. 20.

³ John iii. 8.

distinguished, and the Church has been to them *no other than the gate of Heaven*^b. For instance,

1.) *When a new light has been thrown upon the objects of their faith.* So long as we are embodied and clothed with flesh, fogs and mists will arise, and cloud our prospects. *We see through a glass darkly, and know but in part*^c. But sometimes God is pleased to assist our faculties to receive, and then sends a ray of his own light to illuminate, the objects of faith. Then the things of God are *spiritually discerned*^d: then they appear more distinctly in their excellency, importance, and practical tendency. And how delightful has been the season! There has been a time when the attention has been more fixed than usual, when God has appeared more lovely in his nature and covenant; all lovely in Christ, forgiving, reconciling, rewarding beyond what eye can reach, or heart conceive. Happy season! when the good state of the soul has been more evident, its hope vigorous, its joy unspeakable. When the reasons and motives of religion have triumphed in their evidence, and entered into the very frame and temper of the soul. When the truth in Jesus has produced the joy of moral freedom, and the riches of grace transported to admiration. This has been the case when God has manifested himself by his own light. How bright must the views of the Apostle be, when they were so transforming, *with open face as in a glass, we behold the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory*^e. That was a glorious day, when the disciples assembled, and *were all with one accord in one place*; when the Spirit descended, and communicated his gifts and graces with a surprizing fulness. His entrance was awful; his presence extensive and enriching^f. On how many occasions afterward did they, in their assemblies, magnify and praise their God, and declare his wonders.

K

ders.

^b Gen. xxviii. 17.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^e Acts ii. 1, 2.

^f 1 Cor. ii. 14.

ders. The Gospel worship is more excellent, than the legal. If David could think God's *tabernacle* so amiable^s; if he had such ravishing views of God's *power and glory*^b, and longed most ardently for the return of those seasons, so as to account the hours of expectation tedious, *when shall I come and appear before God*^c. If he, I say, was so affected and pleased in the sanctuary; how much more must we suppose this of the truly pious, in the Christian Church, where the objects are more noble, and the spirit is more diffused. The illumination must be brighter, and the joy more rational and divine.

2.) *When new degrees of strength have been communicated against temptations.* St. Paul's prayer for his friends shews what they might expect and hope for, *that God would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might, by his spirit, in the inner man*^k. Though we might not be able to explain the manner how this is done, any more than how God assists us in the methods of his providence; yet we have no reason to question one more than the other; or doubt whether their strength should be equal to their trials and dangers. The Psalmist declares God's promise and his own trust; because he cannot promise beyond his ability to perform. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*^l. Both pleasure and strength have been communicated in the services of religion. The one naturally follows the other: for when the mind is most at ease, it is then most active and vigorous. 'Tis in the house of God, that his peace, which passeth understanding, often possesses them, and then no wonder that here *they go from strength to strength*^m. The devout exercises of faith, gratitude and love, kindle up a warmth and vivacity,

^s Psal. lxxxiv. 1.

^k Eph. iii. 16.

^m Psal. lxxxiv. 7.

^b Psal. lxiii. 2.

^c Psal. xvi. 1.

^l Isa. xl. 31.

^l Psal. xlii. 2.

ty, that remains sometime with them, and gives them a noble firmness of mind, to meet a danger and resist it. When they have been just before worshipping God, and as it were conversing with Jesus, how easy have they found it to despise a flattering snare, and face a frowning world; and even to glory in tribulations. Most remarkable was this in the first Christians. As they were frequent in their assemblies, and constant in breaking of bread and prayer^a: so they were eminent for their courage and fortitude in suffering. The extraordinary presence and power in the Church made them conquerors in the World, they departed from the council rejoicing, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ^o.

3.) *When they have received unusual comfort under their dejections.* Many of David's Psalms begin in tears, and end in triumph: so it is many times with a Christian. He sits down pensive and sad, and must hang his harp a while on the willow trees. He is full of doubts and fears; all is tumultuous and disturbed within, till he has been in the house of God, and there refreshed, there appeased by a sweet sense of his loving kindness and tender mercy. David was so perplexed and disconcerted with the prosperity of wicked men, that he was even ready to conclude all Religion vain. But when he went into the Sanctuary, he was satisfied; then he understood that their prosperity was short, and their end dreadful^p. What heaviness of spirit? What sinking fears have some experienced? Devotion has raised them to a calmer region; and a promise of God set home to their hearts, has made them go on their way rejoicing. To those that mourn in Zion, that lament national sins before God, to them is given beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

K 2

^a Acts ii. 42.

^o Acts v. 41.

^p Psal. lxxiii. 13, 17.

68 *The Grace &c. of Christ's promise*

ness ¹. Those that are jealous for God's honour, may hope to find him concerned for their comfort. Pious persons have often found seasons of worship, times of refreshing. *Hannah* went into the house of God with a sorrowful spirit; but she departed with joy, and her countenance was no more sad ². We need not think this strange when it is so eminent a character of the King of the Church to be tender and compassionate, *to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised* ³.

4.) *When they have enjoyed a delightful communion with God in Christ.* Communion imports reciprocal acts, an happy intercourse between heaven and earth. As our Saviour is not bodily present, nor God visible, this communion can only be maintained by the medium of ordinances. In those, we solemnly set ourselves to think of those objects; our thoughts lead us to desires and affections expressive of gratitude, esteem, love; to acts of faith, trust, dependance &c. On the other hand, whilst we are engaged in those religious and devout exercises, a divine light and joy flow into the soul; peculiar manifestations of the truth, love and grace of the Redeemer enliven it: and from both result a noble and divine satisfaction. — I can by no means admit this to be a fanciful thing, when it is both promised and experienced. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant* ⁴. *The water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life*: a perpetual source of comfort, which, as it came from God, returns to God, and ends in the blessed eternal enjoyment of him ⁵. This is the manifestation promised to the friends of religion, and not to the World; the result of which is communion with

¹ Isa. lxi. 3.

² 1 Sam. i. 15, 18.

³ Psal. xxv. 14.

⁴ Luke iv. 18. Isa. lxi. 1.

⁵ John iv. 14.

with God in Christ, and the participation of spiritual blessings, as the recompence of sincere obedience. *If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him* *. When the whole church was assembled, St. Paul observes, that the decent, orderly, and profitable exercise of spiritual gifts, would be an inducement to unbelievers to own and approve their worship, *and report that God is in, or among, you of a truth* †. And to name no more passages, that promise is full to the point, *draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you* ‡. — In such a season, how has the soul been elevated and entertained? What holy breathings and aspirations: what serenity and peace has filled and settled it? When the devout Christian has enjoyed the light of God's countenance, and the sense of his love, how has every desire been satisfied, every other prospect darkened, and all the glories of the world turned into deformity? God is the only object of his hopes and desires: Christ and his love the pleasing admired meditation. Such experiences in the house of God have left no room for want, but in the repetition of them; no place for comparisons, but what throws every other object into a distant and contemptible meanness. *A day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness* §.

Those things, I doubt, may be thought by some unintelligible, if not worse: but we need not wonder at it, when a previous disposition of mind is requisite to form a right judgment of them. We find it true in

* John xiv. 21, 22, 23. Sacer intra nos spiritus sedet, malorum bonorumque nostrorum observator et custos: hic prout a nobis tractatus est, ita nos ipse tractat. Bonus vir sine deo nemo est — In unoquoque virorum bonorum (quis Deus incertum est) habitat Deus.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

‡ James iv. 8.

Senec. Epist. 41.

§ Psal. lxxxiv. 10.

in common affairs, that we shall make but little progress in the understanding of them, without inclination and practice. Inclination carries the strength and attention of the soul with it; and practice more than any thing enlarges and improves in knowledge. And why should that be thought absurd in religion, which is true in every art or science? Until we are pre-disposed by suitable inclinations and affections to truth, we shall not form such just and lively conceptions of it, as we ought.^d Our case will be much like that of the man in the Gospel, whose sight was restoring. *He saw men as trees walking^d.* He had some idea of external objects, but it was confused and imperfect. So those divine communications will be imperfectly apprehended, till we have some relish of religion ourselves. *The natural, i. e. the animal or sensual, man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned^e.* Should the case be that we are viciously inclined, that will more than any thing obstruct a right judgment. The nature of sin is to darken the mind; to prejudice it against truth and virtue, and prepare us to embrace every slender objection and excuse that will favour it. Suppose we preach humility and meekness to a proud man; Will he not disdain the instruction, because it lessens him in his own esteem, and throws him into a shade? Suppose we recommend acts of beneficence and charity to a covetous man, it crosses all his views, and any excuse shall determine him more, than religion and humanity. In both cases there is no inward disposition to render the offered truth agreeable. So when we would recommend the notion and advantage of a divine friendship and intercourse, a vicious person can form no notion of it, any more than a swine of the pleasures of an Angel. They know God best, who love and serve him best. *A good understanding have all they, that do his commandments^f.* If men therefore

^d Mark viii. 24.^e 1 Cor. ii. 14.^f Psal. cxi. 10. Dan. xii. 10.

therefore do not understand and believe those things, the fault must be in themselves. *Why do ye not understand my speech, even because ye cannot hear my words?* Vice renders men ignorant and blind in divine things, and their no wonder if they believe not:— But so much for the influence of this presence and power with respect to good Christians. I shall next consider it with respect to sinners.

John viii. 9.

The Grace and Influence of Christ's
promises to Christian Churches.



CHRISTIANITY is the most gracious and
effective expedient that ever was offered to the
world for reforming mankind, and restoring
them to their primitive rectitude, integrity, and hap-
piness. Its precepts are clear; its motives strong; its
authority supreme. But besides this, there is a presence
and power promised, to attend this dispensation, and
carry on its merciful design. By this means an imme-
diate application is made to those who are within its in-
fluence. There is the upon him, and precept upon
precept; and the blessed Spirit of God makes his own
application to the hearts of men; in order to take away
their corruption and obliquity. This



S E R M O N IV.

The Grace, and Influence of Christ's
promise to Christian Churches.

M A T T. xviii. 20.

*Where two or three are gathered together
in my name, there am I in the midst
of them.*

CH R I S T I A N I T Y is the most gracious and effectual expedient that ever was offered to the world for reforming mankind, and restoring them to their primitive rectitude, integrity, and happiness. Its precepts are clear ; its motives strong ; its authority supreme. But besides this, there is a presence and power promised, to attend this dispensation, and carry on its merciful design. By this means an immediate application is made to those who are within its influence. There is line upon line, and precept upon precept : and the blessed Spirit of God makes his occasional visits to the souls of men ; in order to strive with them, and subdue their corruption and obstinacy. This is
what

what I am illustrating, from the passage I have read, in which we have a most gracious promise of Christ to his Church, *that where two or three are met together &c.*

— Here I proposed

I. . . To enquire what we are to understand by this presence of Christ.

II. . . To shew the grace and glorious influence of this promise.

III. . . To Conclude the subject with some suitable improvement.

I. . . I have considered what we are to understand by this presence of Christ; not his personal or bodily presence, but he is present, by his ministers, his ambassadors; by his ordinances, the visible tokens of his favour; by his Spirit, the great agent of his kingdom, to communicate light, strength, and comfort: to rouse men out of their security, and establish them in faith and holiness.

II. . . I am shewing when we may suppose this promise more eminently made good both to saints and sinners. — FIRST, with respect to good Christians, this presence and power are illustrious — when a new light has been thrown upon the objects of their faith, — when new degrees of strength have been communicated against temptations, — when they have received unusual comfort under their dejections, — when they have enjoyed a delightful communion with God in Christ. — So far I have gone. I proceed,

SECONDLY; with regard to sinners.

Sinners are generally thoughtless and secure, and cannot be supposed to trouble themselves much about the offices of religion. They may be led to christian assemblies by custom, curiosity, or friendship; or per-

baps to furnish themselves with a subject of ridicule and contempt; yet such have been many times taken there. Their consciences have been awakened; their danger appeared frightful; their hard obdurate hearts pierced, till they have cried out in agony of soul, *men and brethren what shall we do* ^a? Instances of this nature have been in all ages, both in and out of the church, and deserve to be recorded for the honour of divine grace. There have been such manifestations of a divine presence and power, as have pulled down the strong holds of sin, and changed the whole heart into a better temper. For instance,

1.) *When many sinners have been awakened, humbled and converted on the same occasion.* When there has been a pouring forth of the spirit, and many sons and daughters have been born unto God; many convinced and changed, not from one opinion, or one vice to another, but in their whole moral temper. When nothing appears so dreadful as sin, which before they loved; nothing so amiable as virtue, which before they despised. When the formal become serious; the severe, meek; the censorious, kind; the proud, humble. The design of religion is to effect this, and the vouchsafements of grace are perfectly co-incident with this design. What a noble display of grace is this, when the Gospel-net is thrown with such advantage, as to include multitudes? What a glorious appearance of *Shiloh*, when to him the gathering of the people is ^b? What a joyful day, when it is said of one and another, that salvation is come into his soul. Such a day once there was, when *there were added to the Church*, on hearing one sermon, *about three thousand souls* ^c. The same goodness still triumphed, for the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved ^d. The Churches were established in the faith, and increased in number daily ^e. This indeed was at the first planting of Christianity in the world, when it made the quickest and most amazing progress. It spread like

^a Acts ii. 37.

^d Ibid. ver. 47.

^b Gen. xlix. 10.

^e Acts xvi. 5.

^c Acts ii. 41.

like heaven^f; it diffused every way like light, with bright and quickening rays. But this seemed necessary then, to support the credit and authority of that religion: necessary, that it should triumph in its own evidence, and make its way through opposition by the force of truth and innocence. This it did by the immediate power and blessing of God concurring with it, that the work might appear the more divine. We must not *therefore* expect the same wonderful success; the same glorious manifestations in an ordinary state of things.

2.) *When notorious sinners have been reclaimed, and suddenly checked in their full career of folly and sin.* How glorious is the efficacy of this promise in such instances, and such there have been in all ages of the Church. Persons who had no relish of divine things; no notion of pleasure, but what was derived from animal life; who were greatly hardened, and secure in their sins; yet having been occasionally brought within hearing of God's word; that word has been clothed with power and salvation for them. The representation of the evil and danger of sin has roused their fears; the dissection of a carnal heart has presented them with a draught of their own real character; the display of God's wonderful mercy, in recovering sinners to his favour and image, has humbled them to the dust, where they have admired his patience; adored his purity, and with tears acknowledged the deserts of their pride, ingratitude and enmity. The word in that hour, like the earthquake which opened at once the prison doors and the Jailor's heart, has laid them trembling and prostrate crying out *what must we do to be saved*^g. Not only careless sinners have been thus met with, but ringleaders in wickedness, masters and monsters in iniquity. Those that could expect nothing less than exemplary vengeance; and to have felt the deepest impressions of divine wrath, those, *I say*, have been transformed into

L 2

the

^f Luke xiii. 21.^g Acts xvi. 30.

the amiable characters of virtue. They have prized what once they scorned, and sought what they once abhorred. How triumphant is divine goodness in such instances? How astonishing to see the Lion converted into a lamb; to see *the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots*^h? We find in our Saviour's time that persons of infamous characters, Publicans and harlots, pressed into the kingdom of God. Among the *Corinthian* converts, some had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers (*all characters of damnation*) but they obtained mercy. *And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God*ⁱ. Those are sovereign acts of goodness, not so much what we are to expect, as admire, *that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*^k.

3.) *When great sinners have been not only reclaimed, but employed.* Thus when those, who came into the Church as enemies, have continued there its chiefest ornaments and supports; we see in such instances the glorious efficacy of this promise. Then, when we behold determined sinners building up what they would have often destroyed; not ashamed of what before they scorned; and all their zeal against godliness sanctified into an holy flame, and the ardours of a divine love. How distinguishing are those aids and manifestations of grace! God is pleased sometimes to chuse out such to be instruments of great good to others; and there is reason to think, they will be more abundant in labours. A reflection upon their own former dismal state will teach them to admire and praise God's goodness to them; will render them diligent in redeeming the time they have lost, pressing forward to reach the heights of piety, they attempted so late; and excite in them great compassion towards those, who are obnoxious to the same ruin, which they themselves were once near. How glorious must the place be where such triumphs

^h Jer. xiii. 23.ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 11.^k Rom. v. 20.

triumphs are seen? Of *Zion*, the Church of God, it shall be said, *this and that man was born in her*¹: Men illustrious for their virtue, usefulness and zeal. — *Abraham* was called out of the darkness of Paganism to the worship of the true God, and a glorious light he was; a pattern of unshaken FAITH, not only to that age, but all ages of the world. *Moses* by a surprizing train of providences was preserved, educated, and disposed to be the instrument of delivering God's people from slavery. He was an excellent pattern of WISDOM; having, by divine direction, framed a constitution of laws and government, more to be admired, than any other system of antient legislators, for the justness of its principles, and the utility of its publick authority. *Paul* was another instance of this grace. He never was probably in a Christian Church, unless to become an informer, a most detestable character; yet it must be remember'd, that he was a frequenter of God's worship in the Temple, and a zealot for the established religion of his country, not yet abolished. No doubt but God saw something in his warm and passionate temper, that might render him greatly useful under a better direction. He obtained mercy^m, and became a noble example of ZEAL. His character, drawn with his own hand, is one of the worst, *a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious*, as in the fore-cited passage. He made havock of the churches; scrupled no violence, outrage and even murder in the career of his bigotry and madness. But how sudden a change! His malignity is changed into benevolence; his murdering zeal into one friendly and compassionate to mankind. He propagates what before he detested; and we see the diligence, activity, and boldness of the persecutor, remain in the courage, resolution, and fortitude of the minister of Jesus Christ. He has now the courage to defend his Lord and Master in chains, before councils and tribunals, and all the forms of terror and death. *None of those things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that*

¹ Psal. lxxxvii. 3, 5.^m 1 Tim. i. 13.

that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of Godⁿ. Surprizing change! That he should enroll himself among those names he once detested, yea, and subscribe himself in the lowest rank! I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God^o. The proud Pharisee is gone, and the humble Christian appears; self-confidence is lost in the admiration of divine goodness: by the grace of God I am what I am^p. A glorious light shone into his soul, and he reflects upon it with great satisfaction, that he did not stifle and suppress it, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision^q. He made it a light unto his feet, and a lamp unto his path; and applied it as the rule and spring of all his labours. And his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all. Yet least this should be thought too much for him to say, who was an object of so much favour, he humbly corrects the expression, and takes to himself only the pleasure of being an active instrument, that the power, the success, the glory of all his labours might be ascribed, where his debt of gratitude and love was so great, adding, yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me^r.

4.) *When such great changes have been produced in the moral world by the ministry of men, we have reason to think of this gracious promise to the Church. Men, who are the instruments, are too weak to accomplish such mighty things of themselves without the concurrence of a superior presence and power. All that they can do is to make a fair and honest representation of the Gospel, and offer the most likely considerations to enlighten and persuade rational creatures. But when sin lies deeply intrenched, and its bulwarks are rendered strong, 'tis not easy to make an impression on them with all the batteries of reason and oratory. If*
reason

ⁿ Acts xx. 24.^o 1 Cor. xv. 9.^p Ibid. ver. 10.^q Acts xxvi. 19.^r Ibid. ver. 10.

reason could produce such surprizing effects, what might we not expect from those masters of reason in our day. Light and motives are not wanting, and yet the strong holds of sin are so far from being demolished, that they really increase. Supposing them to go so far as to produce a conviction of the truth and importance of religion, and to excite some good wishes and resolutions, yet all *this goodness is as a morning cloud, that is soon dissipated, and as the early dew it goeth away*³. If we consult fact and experience, we find the rank growth of sin, and must confess to the reproach of mankind, *that sin is not to be reasoned out of the world*. Not reason, not reputation and interest are sufficient sometimes to produce any good effects, where the imaginations are high, and the prejudices in favour of sin deep and inveterate. It plainly requires some stronger hand than human agency to cast down, and subdue them. Blessed be God this provision is made for us in the aids of the spirit; a provision that needed not have been made, had human agency been alone capable of effecting this, or human reason sufficient without it⁴. —

There

³ Hof. vi. 4.

⁴ The most plausible objection to this way of reasoning is this. "Reason is, or ought to be, a sufficient guide to the favour of God; and for this plain reason, because a man is accountable for his actions, which would be most unreasonable and unjust, unless he is in a capacity of directing such actions." The argument looks specious, and seems to conclude with great triumph. But if we take a nearer view of it, we shall find it not capable of reaching the point aimed at, *namely*, to overthrow the expediency and necessity of revelation; and those assistances it has provided for us. The weakness and fallacy of the argument lies in those two words *favour* and *capacity*. Favour is an indefinite term, and may signify any degree or measure of divine favour, or that particular *one*, which is offered in the Gospel. To say that reason (*i. e.* rightly used, and in the best manner we can) is sufficient to guide us to *some* degree of favour, where no other light and assistance are offered, or can be had, I think cannot be denied. It appears to me founded on this evident principle, that God will judge the whole world in righteousness, *i. e.* he will deal equitably with all mankind, according to the dispensation they are under, and the different

There is indeed, as I observed, a suitableness and fitness in human agency to convince and persuade ; but those sinners before mentioned, masters and monsters in iniquity are not so soon impressed : yet when, a divine power concurs with it, it prevails even over those. 'Tis a glorious display of grace, when *by the foolishness of preaching, the power of God is manifested to salvation*^u. The love, as well as the power of Christ appears eminently this way, *when the foolish things of the world confound the wise ; and weak things the mighty ; and base things and despised, yea things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence*^x. The bow is drawn at a venture by a human hand, the arrow has a divine direction, and pierces the heart. *Thus the weapons of our warfare are mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds*^y. — When such effects are produced by plain, honest, and affectionate preaching, without flattering the guilty, or soothing the prejudiced ; without yielding to an unreasonable humour, or cringing to an interesting popularity, 'tis a proof that our Lord and Master was with us. The case of the prophet is a proper emblem here. He stood unmoved by *a wind that rent the mountains*, and by *an earthquake that shook the*

different talents and opportunities he has given them. *Mat. xxv. 14—30. Rom. ii. 11—16.* But this I deny that reason alone is a sufficient guide to THAT favour of God, or THAT measure of knowledge, virtue and happiness, which christianity proposes and calls us to. The light and assistances of the Gospel are necessary to such refinement and perfection of moral life. And they contribute to the capacity we really enjoy of carrying our actions to such an eminent, shining and divine virtue. This capacity, in a Gospel state, does not entirely result from the internal powers and abilities of the agent, *i. e.* from reason only ; but also from the light of revelation, and the assistance of the spirit. Those advantages contribute to enlarge our present capacity, and therefore we are justly accountable for our actions, because nothing is required of us beyond the capacity we are placed in. And consequently it is not a true proposition, that reason is a sufficient guide of itself to THAT favour of God, which is offered in the Gospel: and THAT eminent virtue which is made requisite to it, by the same Gospel.

^u 1 Cor. i. 18^x Ibid. 28, 29.^y 2 Cor. x. 4.

the earth, and by a fire that usually wafts and terrifies, because the Lord was in neither of those. But when the still small voice succeeded them, there was such a secret energy and power that went along with it, that it caused the prophet to wrap his face in his mantle^a. So when the strength of reason cannot move, nor the charms of eloquence persuade, a plain word of exhortation, accompanied with a divine blessing, has struck through the conscience and made the sinner tremble. *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, subject to weakness and infirmities, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us^a.*—The extreme difficulty of subduing the power of vicious habits, and of changing the bias of a carnal heart is, by a bold surprizing figure, compared to a natural impossibility. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, and the Leopard his spots, then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil^b.* And what are we to affect this by our best skill and address? If we estimate the case of such, we must be convinced of the necessity of a divine co-operation, to awaken and fix the attention; to impress the conscience with a sense of danger, and give quite another heart^c. What difficulties must we encounter, what strange things persuade determined sinners to do, such as we can scarce hope our reasons and motives should accomplish? We must persuade them to renounce those pleasures, which are dearer to them than friendship or reputation, health or interest; to deny themselves in what is most grateful; to renounce the allurements and vanities of sin, which to them are most engaging. Nay, we must persuade them to do, what is not only difficult, but painful; *to pluck out the right eye, to cut off the right hand^d, to subdue the irregular propensities of animal nature, to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection^e; to believe things they have never seen; and hope for a good they have no taste of; and embrace those*

M exalted

^a 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

^a 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^b Jer. xiii. 23.

^c 1 Sam. x. 9.

^d Matt. v. 29, 30.

^e 1 Cor. ix. 27.

exalted precepts, which all their lusts disdain and oppose. Oh painful conflict ! Surprizing change ! How can we hope to succeed in such attempts ? And yet we do succeed many times. We see a dark chaos forming into light order and beauty, the rocks rending, the dead in sin rising and giving glory to the God of Heaven ; that God, whom they have insulted and blasphemed. Is it not reasonable to acknowledge the aids of Providence and Grace with us, in such surprizing changes ? That not our persuasion alone, but the still small voice of the spirit in it prevailed ; not the thunder of our voice, but of a power that united with it, made it effectual. Thus it becomes us to ascribe the honour of our usefulness and success to that presence and blessing, which secures it. *So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. For we are labourers together with God* ^f.

Thus I have shewn you in what instances we must suppose the grace and influence of this promise to be more eminently discovered. I would not be misunderstood, in so important a principle, as that of *divine assistance*, and therefore beg leave to add by way caution.

In the *first place*, what has been observed, in the illustration of this subject, must not be so understood, as to weaken our regards for the institutions, and ordinances of religion. Divine assistance is *generally* afforded in the use of means, and the diligent exercise of our faculties. They are appointments by the same authority, on which our religion stands. They have in them a natural tendency to promote the ends of religion ; and consequently there is reason to expect, that he who instituted them, should regard and prosper them, when honestly used. I own that God has no where obliged himself to help none, but those who use such means : *he is sought of them that asked not for him, and found of them that sought him* not. He

^f 1 Cor. iii. 7, 9. 2 Cor. vi. 1.

He sometimes takes hold of Sinners, when nothing was more distant from their thoughts and designs : and in a gospel state always prevents them by a talent of his grace. But I don't find it any where promised that sinners may generally expect his gracious manifestations in their security, carelessness, and obstinate pursuit of wickedness ; or that they are encouraged to hope for *further* measures of grace, when they have neglected the *first*, that was given without their seeking or asking. The text supposes the use of means ; and the presence and power here promised is in the assembly of christians. — We must not apply extraordinary cases to the general expectation of christians. Those whom God designs as instruments of good to others, he may call and qualify as he pleases. He may even compel and force them into his service, without injury to any. He may do this by unusual and surprizing ways, without intending to give others the same expectations. We must not, *for instance*, expect the same light and voice Sr. Paul had at his conversion : any more than his *rapture to paradise*^h, or *Elijah's* passage to heaven by a *chariot of fire and a whirlwind*ⁱ. Those are sovereign acts, which shew the greatness of God's mercy and power, and what he can do : which encourage us to hope, that, in the way of our duty, we shall want the assistance of neither, when we see those, who were out of the way of their duty, such objects of both. — *Again*. We must understand this doctrine, in the general course of religion, consistent with our being moral agents. For, as such we are *only* capable of law, religion, rewards or punishments. Those following powers constitute us moral agents, *viz.* UNDERSTANDING, by which we receive the ideas of things ; REASON, by which we review those ideas, compare them with one another, and refer them to some rule for discovering their moral quality ; whether good or evil, fit or unfit to become motives

M 2

of

^h 2 Cor. xii. 4.ⁱ 2 Kings ii. 11.

of action; WILL or a power of self determination, by which, amidst a variety of objects, we choose or refuse to act. Though we suppose those powers weakened, depraved, or under a wrong bias; yet we cannot suppose them destroyed. Take away any one of them, and man ceases to be a moral agent, and at the same time he ceases to be accountable for his actions. We must therefore in our reasonings on this subject, consider man as an active, rational creature, one that acts voluntarily, with design and choice, though it may be, both are wrong. This is the prerogative of our beings above the brutal world; this the true ground of those pleasures and enjoyments, which brutes are not capable of. In this view assistance is a proper expression. It would be absurd to talk of assisting a clock to move, or a stone to fall; because their motion is necessary: but not to assist an active being to act well, whose action is voluntary. Such a being is assisted by offering truth in a proper light; by removing the prejudices of sense, appetite and passion, by fixing the attention, by suggesting proper motives and ends of action, and impressing his hopes and fears with suitable objects. This the spirit of God does in a manner congruous to our nature, and agreeable to the exercise of our own faculties. He usually communicates his grace by the medium of our rational powers, and in such a manner, that we cannot often distinguish the access and recess of his influence, from the operation of our own minds. *So is every one that is born of the spirit* ^k. This general truth is well expressed by the apostle in a particular case. *Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, is settled in a firm resolution and purpose of mind, having no necessity, i. e. of marrying; but hath power over his own will, is free from paternal authority to pursue what he chooses, and hath so decreed in his own heart, doth well*^l. Religion and virtue therefore, in our present state, must be considered as resulting from the conjunctive influence of the spirit of God, and

^k John iii. 8.^l 1 Cor. vii. 37.

and human agency ; which points out to us the ground of our dependance, and the reasonableness of fear, lest we should seem to come short of the promised rest. *If ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live^m.*—*Finally* ; and which I principally intend here, we must not so explain the assistances of the Gospel, as to leave sinners excusable. We see the many shifts and evasions they are capable of, how invention is fruitful to find out some pretence or other for reconciling their living in sin with the hopes of heaven. “ If this grace is necessary, say they, as we are told ; then, since it is not in our power to give this to ourselves, we cannot be otherwise than what we are, till this is vouchsafed ; and therefore must wait till that time comes. And when that comes, the grace of God will subdue our obstinacy, give quite another bias to our thoughts and affections, and make us better men.” Fatal reasoning ! And yet I doubt it is too common in the worldⁿ. But where is there any ground for it ; and that so clear and certain, that a man would venture his salvation upon it ? The Gospel is plainly a constitution of laws, exhortations, promises and threatnings adapted to the nature of man, as a moral agent ; and which condemns us as inexcusable, if we are not influenced by them. Duty infers capacity ; and exhortation excludes force. In this constitution God is before-hand with us, by putting a talent into our hands ; and graciously promises to own and reward our improvements with more and richer gifts. Thus the parable of the talents closes ; *unto every one that hath improved, shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not improved, shall be taken away, even that first talent, which he hath^o.* Divine assistance then is perfectly consistent with the exercise

^m Rom. viii. 13. Philip. ii. 12, 13. Tit. ii. 11, 12. Heb. iv. 1.

ⁿ This is not all supposition, and mere rational conjecture ; but what I myself have found true upon very solemn occasions.

^o Matt. xxv. 29. Mark iv. 24, 25.

cise of our faculties, and the promise of further measures of it expressly requires it, even our consideration, diligence and prayer. We need not perplex ourselves in so plain a case by setting one passage of scripture against another. They are all consistent, and resolve themselves into this, what God promises, supposes the use of our faculties and endeavours; and what God commands, supposes the concurrence of his gracious assistance and help. Where the case is made so important by its consequences I thought it my duty to speak to it with freedom and plainness; and eradicate, if possible, a prejudice that crosses the whole frame of our religion, *namely*, that nothing is required of us towards our salvation^p. You will be all witnesses for me this day, that I exhort and beseech sinners to shew themselves men, to turn from their evil ways and live: which if they neglect to do, their ruin will be from themselves; their damnation, the effect of their own choice, and what might have been prevented, whilst they were within the reserves of mercy: but never after.—O the happy NOW, the dreadful NEVER!—
I proceed to

The Application

of the subject, concerning this promise of Christ to his Church, that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he will be in the midst of them.

1.) *We have cause to be very thankful for a promise, that raises us above our infirmities, and fills the Soul with a cheerful light and hope.* Sin is a dark deformed thing, and naturally breeds distance between God and man. It gives us terrifying apprehensions of him, and makes us glad to fly from the thought, even when we cannot fly from the power of God. We find the parent of mankind, when he became a sinner, would fain have hid himself from an eye that penetrates the deepest privacy and the darkest hell; from a presence, which just before he loved and adored. Happy for

^p *Vid.* Answer to the 85th question (*what doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin?*) in the Assembly's Catechism,

us that a presence all encouraging is restored to us. *God will indeed dwell with man on earth.* His publick worship is a standing proof of his favour; the peculiar manifestation of it there is established by promise. What a motive this to love and praise him? Here is peace on earth, and good-will to men; here the Saviour appears eminently our peace. The distance and estrangement to God is removed; *for we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God*^a. We should have esteemed it an happiness to have seen Christ in the flesh; to have heard his gracious words; and followed the course of his miraculous triumphs: storms and winds obeying his voice, diseases healed, devils dispossessed. How much greater happiness are we capable of from this promise? To have his word come to our souls cloathed with power and salvation; to have the storms within us laid; the distempers of the mind healed; grace insinuated by this and the other means, softening the obstinacy of our hearts; curing our blindness; dispossessing our prejudices; and restoring us to rectitude of mind. This would be of more consequence than the other: *that* might indulge our curiosity and wonder, *this* will advance our perfection and happiness. And therefore on this view of the case, the promise should be always received with esteem and gratitude.

2.) *The divine blessing expected in publick worship will be a constant reason for our frequenting it, and answer every trifling excuse that would keep us from it.* Good men have always prized those opportunities, and found them delightful improving seasons. Here *David's* doubts were satisfied, and his joy raised to transports, *How amiable are thy tabernacles O Lord of hosts*^r. Here Christ manifested himself after his resurrection, and pronounced the blessing of peace^s. Here the Holy Ghost descended with all his rich gifts and gracious influences^t. And here those, who have been any ways remark-

^a Ephes. ii. 14. 19.

^s Luke xxiv. 36.

^r Psal. lxxxiv. 1. Ibid. xxvii. 4.

^t Acts ii. 2, 3, 4.

remarkable in the manner of their conversion, have shewn their particular regards afterwards. When we can so easily excuse our attendance here, is it not to be presumed, that we have no just sense of a sinful state, and of our estrangement from God; no relish of spiritual and divine comforts; no want of God, or fear of future consequences? Otherwise we should put ourselves often in the way of a blessing, and regret the loss of an opportunity, as it might prove the loss of a favour, which would have ennobled and enriched us for ever. 'Tis a melancholy thought that in a christian nation, so few comparatively should stately worship God. The *Poor* are very negligent in this case, when they of all other should be found in the practice. They have but little in this world, and one would think they should desire to have something in the next, that they might not be losers in both worlds. One thing should peculiarly endear the worship of God to them, that they have the honour to be named in Christ's commission. *He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor*^u. But if they will not attend, they slight their privilege, and throw away their blessing. Time was, when *the Kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and the violent took it by force*^z: when *the Kingdom of God was preached, and every man pressed into it*^y. But how is the case altered since? We seem to think the kingdom of heaven should commit a violence upon us, and force us to come into it. Such is our indifference; such our reluctance! The Papists may well shame us out of our negligence. The places of publick worship are to be seen every where amongst them. Their churches, chapels, and oratories are innumerable, and generally frequented. If they have a worse religion than we, as certainly they have, yet they have a better zeal. Let us *therefore* beg of God to incline our hearts unto his testimonies, and to love the habitation of his house. Let us prepare to meet him in the way of his blessing, rather

^u Luke iv. 18.^z Matt. xi. 12.^y Luke xvi. 16.

rather than of his judgments. One or the other we must expect; and if we throw a slight upon the one, he knows how to make us tremble under the other. *He will pour out nothing less than fury upon the heathen that know not God, and upon the families that call not on his name.* But,

3.) *If we hope for blessings in the house of God, we should aim at a temper and deportment suitable to such an expectation.* If ever there be occasion for recollection of mind; for gravity and decency of behaviour; for purity and vigour of affections, it must be when we come to appear before God.——Prayer would be a good introduction to the service. This is a duty which should run through the whole frame of our religion, not only as an act of piety itself, but as a means of disposing us to every other act. The prepared heart is a great advantage to the success and pleasure of devotion, and this is from God^a, as is every other good and perfect gift^a. Of him therefore let us ask grace to dispose us to a right temper: beg of him, in some pious ejaculations, to prevent the intrusion of vain thoughts; beg a mind fixed, and united in all its powers, an heart sensible of its wants and open to conviction, an affectionate, grateful resentment of divine love. Thus prepared and guarded we may hope to meet a blessing.——*Again.* What we pray for, we should endeavour after ourselves, viz. a serious considerate mind. The heathens in their sacrifices summoned the attention of the people with an *hoc age*, mind what you are about. We have much more reason, considering the superiority of the service, to address ourselves solemnly to it; that when we pray, it may be with our *whole heart*^b; when we praise and adore, *all that is within us might bless his holy name*^c; when we hear, it may be as those who consider the messages of life and death to be of the utmost importance. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*^d. God

N

requireth

^a Jer. x. 25.^b Prov. xvi. 1.^c Jam. i. 17.^d Psal. cxix. 2.^e Psal. ciii. 1.^f Matt. xiii. 43.

requireth nothing more than the heart, and nothing less will he accept. *My son give me thy heart*^e. We come not into the house of God, as into a gay assembly, to make a shew, and pay our compliments to one another; but to worship God, to learn the way to be virtuous and happy, and what should engage our attention more. — *Finally*, we should not forget what is God's end in communicating aids and comforts to us in his Church, *namely*, to fit us more for the offices of humanity and life out of it, which obtained is an eminent blessing. Piety, that does not influence us in this manner, is deceitful. If it does not promote the observance of justice, temperance and charity; if it does not produce in us kind and generous affections towards others, no wonder if we come and go without a blessing. *Pure religion and undefiled before God, and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*^f. We must have a disposition to do what God requires, *i. e. to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with him*^g, or we bar the way to all favour.

4.) On the strength of this promise, and the veracity of him who made it, *we hope for the conversion of the worst of sinners, in the house of God*. We are ready sometimes to despair of success; of making any impression on the heart, *that, like leviathan's, is firm as a stone, as hard as a piece of the nether mill-stone*^h. We fill our mouths with arguments, and our hearts with hope, that *now* will be the happy season of conviction, when we shall subdue the sinners pride and prejudices. *Now* we hope to take hold of their reason, and rouse their consciences; to shew them effectually the enmity within; their present distraction, and future danger. *Now* we flatter ourselves, that we cannot fail of rendering Christ and his religion all lovely, in whose name we speak. And what is oftentimes the issue? We are disappointed. We find, we have been doing no
more

^e Prov. xxiii. 26.

^f Jam. i. 27.

^g Mic. vi. 8.

^h Job xli. 24.

more than writing upon the sand, and plowing among rocks; so that we are almost tempted to say that we will speak no more in this name. But when we read of one that was sanctified, of whom many devils had possession¹. When we find a *Paul*, just before reaking with the blood of the saints, list himself into their number, and glorying to share with them in their sufferings, we conceive some good hopes. Thus we encourage ourselves. Christ can clothe his word with salvation, and direct that to the heart, which would otherwise die in the ear. He can make those tremble, that we cannot touch; and raise in power, what is sown in weakness. So long as *we are workers together with him*², we fear not the sophistry of carnal reasonings; nor the resistance of strong prejudices, and high imaginations. He knows the time, the means, the tender season, and can excite us to secure the conquest. 'Tis hard, I confess, that, after all he has done to convince and oblige mankind, he should stand in need of any advocate; hard, that such an advocate, when he pleads his cause, should not be favourably heard; but the hardest of all will be for sinners themselves, to perish with the sound of the gospel in their ears. We pray God to have compassion on those, who have none on themselves. We hope, that his house is the place where a divine power and glory will be often manifested. We hope an effectual blessing will accompany the line upon line, and precept upon precept: *That the hour will come when the dead in sin, shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and, we can assure them, they that hear, that believe and obey it, shall live*³.

5.) Hence it appears *that nothing can be a greater judgment than to be deprived of our solemn assemblies*: because then we must expect to lose the hope of this gracious presence and power. Our Saviour came to redeem us from the effects of sin and misery; to enable us to govern those appetites and passions, the inferior

N 2

part

¹ Luke viii. 2.² 2 Cor. vi. 1.³ John v. 25.

part of ourselves, which, when they govern us, become the sources of every mischief and disorder. His method of accomplishing this design is very human: with kindness and decorum, with persuasion and reason, with an assistance, that might strengthen our faculties, and give them an happy bias to truth and goodness. In his Father's house he will pour out all his graces; that every heart might offer pure incense there, and every tongue confess his authority and love to the glory of the Father. But if this is no more; if the opportunity of publick worship ceases, what an obstruction must it prove to this design. — When the ark of God was taken, it was said, *the glory is departed from Israel*.^m We lose our glory with the gospel; we lose our strength and joy with the kingdom and church of God. And must not this introduce the worst of evils? We see how bad it is with us in the midst of opportunities for publick worship. How does sin prevail against all our endeavours? The ax is laid to the root of the tree, *viz. sensual pleasure*; yet the plant still grows and spreads. What fast hold has the immoderate love of pleasure taken of us? If we are so fond of outward pomp and state: so resolved to live in pride, luxury, and excess, we cannot hope that a fair and honest income should maintain it. It will in time become almost necessary to bear the charges of some vices, by the help of other vices, and to supply the wants of luxury and pleasure, by injustice, fraud and oppression. A miserable state indeed! Have we no reason to fear that the blessing may depart from our assemblies, even when the appearances of them subsist? — Where are the seven famous churches of *Asia*; where the renowned churches of *Africa*? They are now lost in a strange superstition, barbarity and darkness; and we can scarce tell the place, where some of them stood. Dreadful judgment! *Ephesus* was expressly warned of the removal of her lightⁿ. Our Saviour has made it the standing order

order of his gospel, that they should lose it, who were not the better for it^o. If we will not honour God, he will pour contempt upon all our glory. 'Tis easy for him to cross our schemes, and blast our hopes: and, if we will not keep to the measures of virtue and religion, suffer us to run headlong into measures, that will make us fall, poor and unpitied. Nothing but *woe* can befall us *when God departs from us*^p. Let us *therefore* see, and fear, and deprecate so heavy a judgment. Let us frequent the worship of God, not resting in outward privileges, as those did, *who cried the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord^q*, who yet were very bad men: but as those who are desirous of improving in real religion. Let our principal view be, not a name or a notion, but a renewed mind: not a party zeal, but an heavenly divine temper, which breathes humility, purity, righteousness, and every kind and generous affection.

6.) *And lastly*, The duty resulting from all is, *that it concerns us to get this presence and power with us*. I have considered you as moral agents, and therefore must suppose the want of this to be owing to yourselves; for faithful is he that hath promised. We cannot suppose this promise an arbitrary constitution, but a matter of favour offered to us, and consequently brought within the reach of our faculties. If we earnestly desire and seek it, we shall not go without it. There is a passage in the prophet, which shews this to be the case. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes^r*. Here were eminent and spiritual blessings promised, divine assistance ensured, the strongest and most absolute terms made use of; both the assistance and the work divine. Was there any thing required
of

^o Matt. xxi. 43.

^p Hof. ix. 12.

^q Jer. vii. 4.

^r Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

of them in order to their enjoying them?—Yes. *I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them*^s. They were to ask of God those blessings, which pre-supposed a sense of their dependance; a sense of their wants, and of the suitableness of those blessings to them. There is enough in scripture and our own experience to convince us, that as we can do nothing effectually in religion without God; so he will do nothing ordinarily without us. Upon this ground it is, that we have any room to reason, expostulate, entreat and beseech you. I beg your indulgence a little, whilst I do so.

Some of you may complain of yourselves, that you want life and spirit in your religion; that you seem to be fallen into an habitual dullness and decay; and that you have sat long under the droppings of the sanctuary with little pleasure and advantage; *my leanness, my leanness, woe unto me*^t. This flesh will be often an incumbrance to us; and a disorder here, may occasion a lowness and depression of spirit, which will go with us into religion. But excepting this case, we have reason to impute the ground of our complaint to our own negligence. We do not, for instance, stir up the gifts of God, that are in us; or we do not regard the frame and temper of our spirits, and so unavoidably sink and settle in the outward forms of religion. Our vigour and activity decline, because our first love is abated. *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love*^v. Thou art grown more cool in thy zeal, more unsteady in thy walk; not so forward, so watchful, so exemplary as thou wast used to be; and this backsliding shews a defect in thy love. The advice to them is proper for us in this case. *Remember from whence thou art fallen, repent and do the first works*^x. We complain of those declensions, but our fault may be, that our attention is drawn away by other objects. We have set up idols in our own hearts, and

^s Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^t Ibid. ver. 5.

^v Isa. xxiy. 16.

^x Rev. ii. 4.

and no wonder then if in the house of God, they wander after our *covetousness*, after that which influences our desire and engrosses our soul. If we have another and a better treasure, that will naturally draw our thoughts to it; *for where the treasure is, there the heart will be also*¹. If we examine ourselves impartially we shall find the cause of our complaint in ourselves. Tho' I must observe here, that to be in any measure sensible of our own imperfections is a good sign, and a good disposition towards the reviving of religion in us. Let us therefore rouse up ourselves out of this supine state; attend to the workings of our own spirits, and shew a concern for our eternal safety equal to the importance of it. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*².

We have reason sometimes to complain of others, that they continue hard and obstinate; that their prejudices are still impenetrable, and all we can say, on the most moving subjects, is lost upon them. Who is to be blamed for this? Not God. His grace may be had, if there is any sincerity in his offers, or truth in his promises. Sinners are still rational creatures; they are surrounded with the means of life; the messages of the gospel are within their reach, and often within their hearing. What God expects from them, is, that they should consider those messages. Suppose those things were not likely to rise up in their own thoughts, yet when they are proposed, they can think of them, and enquire into their nature and tendency. And if they do what they can, God will enable them to do what they ought. But the case is, they love their sins better than their souls; and had rather be and do any thing than part with them, than mortify their corrupt inclinations. A form, a notion, a party, that will excuse this trouble, shall be readily embraced, tho' their eternal happiness or ruin are the things in issue. The fault is their own. They will think so hereafter, and might think so now, if they did but really believe the word

¹ Matt. vi. 21.

² Philip. ii. 12.

word of God. *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.— I would have gathered you ; and ye would not—My provisions were all ready, and the invitation made ; your excuses were as ready, and prevented my goodness, according to the parable.— God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed^a.*

Various are the reasonings of sinners in defence of themselves ; yet methinks their very reasoning against this truth, is a proof of their capacity for improving it. One thing perhaps has greatly contributed to their security in sin, which deserves to be taken notice of. *They imagine their sin to result necessarily from their constitution.* They find in themselves such powerful stimulations and impulses to sin, that they cannot resist them. This is not true, and I will say more than this, that the sinner himself does not believe it true. “ If thou didst believe it, O sinner, why does thy countenance fall, when thou hast done wickedly ? Why does thy conscience rebuke thee, when there was no accuser or witness but thyself ? Why dost thou fear and tremble ; why lament thy case, and resolve to do so no more ? All this is the effect of conviction, that thy sin is thy own personal act, not necessitated, but chosen, not the result of constitution, but will.” So it is upon many occasions, when mens notions and opinions are against us ; when their tongues are against us, their consciences are on our side. When we exhort them to righteousness and obedience, we have an advocate in their own bosoms, that owns the propriety and rectitude of such advice.

Let me therefore exhort and beseech you, O immortal souls, to assert that moral liberty, which Christ has called you to. Shew yourselves men, aim at a conduct and behaviour worthy of that character : deliver yourselves from the low impure joys of sin, and aspire to the nobler pleasures of virtue and heaven. I call

^a John v. 40. Luke xlii. 34. Matt. xxii. 4. Jam. i. 13, 14.

call upon you, if there are any such here, who are in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity, to pray for this freedom. Upon you, that are careless and secure; that are dead in trespasses and sins, to be-think yourselves in time, and enter into the consequences of your actions. You hear what the Gospel says, and can form some notion of your dreadful danger. *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.* Don't discourage yourselves by this and the other difficulty. Time is hastening whilst you are deliberating and unresolved. See how the sands fall, and the hasty sun declines, and the evening shadows of life are lengthening. Consider how soon the important scenes will open. The new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness; which you are not yet fit for: the Judge on his throne with a burning world at his feet, when all the objects of your pride and vanity will be no more. *Now* we wait for your resolution. Take but the same pains to save, that you have done to damn yourselves, and you need not question the success; nay take but the same pains to get heaven, as you do to get the world and you would not miscarry. *If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her, as for hid treasures. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.*^d To your resolutions add your most fervent prayers to heaven for mercy and grace. And with such dispositions come into the house of God, and then we hope that glory will fill the place, and that day salvation come into your souls: *Which God of his infinite mercy grant through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

^d Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^e Ephes. v. 14.

^f Prov. ii. 5.

BOOKS sold by J. NOON, at the *White Hart* in
Cheapside, near *Mercer's Chapel*.

1. **T**HE Principles of Religious Liberty asserted and the abuse of them disclaimed: to which are added a preface and notes, explaining some important truths of Natural and Revealed Religion.—2. *Reflections on Human Life*; designed to lead us to the true knowledge of ourselves and our duty.—3. *God's promises the comfort and security of his People in all times of danger*: preached during the time of the late Rebellion.—4. *The death of Ministers considered and improved*; occasioned by the death of some eminent Pastors near together.—5. *National Gratitude due for National Mercies*. A Thanksgiving Sermon.—6. *The Pastoral Care*; shewn to be a sincere love to the Souls of Men. An Ordination Sermon.—7. *Virtue the Basis of Publick Happiness*; Shewing the way of Reformation and Peace.—8. *The Nature, Obligation, and Benefit of Publick Worship*, in TWO SERMONS: to which are added TWO OTHER SERMONS, relative to the same subject, concerning the *Grace and Influence of Christ's promise to Christian Churches*; designed to promote the Honour of God, and engage his protection of our Publick Interests. *Those above by Dr. MILNER.*

At the same Place may be had,

1. Two large Practical Grammars; the one of the GREEK TONGUE, the other of the LATIN TONGUE, drawn up on the same plan, and in English; established upon rational principles and classical authorities, with a large explanation of elliptical constructions in both languages, and of Dialect in the Greek, and of the various uses of the Preposition in the Latin; also a vocabulary and three indexes to each Grammar. 2. vol. Second Edition. N. B. Both these Grammars are designed as a sufficient collection of Grammatical learning for the assistance of Scholars in the upper Classes; or Gentlemen, who would revive their acquaintance with either Language.

2. *The Accidence of Words*, in the Latin Tongue, and a new Syntax in one Sheet, with the Ellipsis under each rule, where proper.

3. *Rhetoric* or the Principles of Oratory, with two Chapters, the one on Memory, the other pronunciation, respecting the gesture, and voice; of style; some beautiful passages translated; an Account of Demosthenes and Cicero &c.

4. *Praxis Grammatica*, or twelve of Lucians Dialogues, du Guard's Edit. and Isocrates ad Demon. parfed, designed as a first book in Greek.

